

Honourable Members of the Legislative Assembly,

I have great pleasure in addressing you at the commencement of the first session of the year 2001. I extend my warm New Year greetings to all of you.

2. This is the concluding session of the Eleventh Legislative Assembly. In the last five years this House has witnessed many outstanding debates in each of the sessions and has given shape to the progressive policies of the Government. I am happy to congratulate you for your contribution in guiding the Government and ensuring the welfare of the State.

3. The political scene in our country has changed dramatically over the last 50 years. In order to strengthen the unity and integrity of India, this Government will continue to urge that the Constitution should be amended to provide greater autonomy to the States with additional devolution of powers and a federal set up at the Centre.

4. This Government has honoured the vital mandate given by the people of this State for providing a corruption free and transparent administration. The Government has taken appropriate decisions on the recommendations of the committee headed by Justice Ramanujam and has implemented them to prevent corruption in administration. Tamilnadu is the first State to enact legislation imparting transparency in tender procedures.

5. Maintenance of law and order has been accorded high priority by this Government. It has successfully taken steps to ensure social harmony and peace in the State by holding meetings with the leaders of all political parties and ascertaining their views. Most of the recommendations of the Justice Mohan Committee to prevent caste clashes have been accepted and implemented. As a result of the steps taken by this Government, there has been a sharp decline in the number of persons affected by caste and communal violence in the last two years.

6. This Government has successfully maintained law and order by modernizing the police force, collecting information on potential problems and amicably resolving them by taking appropriate steps. The State Human Rights Commission set up to enquire into complaints of human rights violations is functioning effectively.

7. The High Level Committee set up by this Government is monitoring the prices of commodities that are necessary for the daily life of the people such as food grains, edible oils, pulses and vegetables. About 1.59 crore families are getting essential commodities at fair prices through the public distribution system. The Government is likely to incur an expenditure of Rs.1,700 crores towards food subsidy in the current financial year. Tamilnadu is the only state which provides rice at a subsidized rate of Rs.3.50 per kg to all sections of the public without any distinction between those living below the poverty line or above the poverty line. Hon'ble Members are aware that the present system of distribution of essential commodities including

rice, sugar and kerosene is being continued. To ensure that farmers get a good price for their paddy, this Government is implementing the parallel procurement system for the current Samba season. This is the only State which provides Rs.40 per quintal as incidental charges to farmers over and above the minimum support price fixed by the Central Government.

8. As a result of the precautionary measures taken by the Government, major damages have been averted when Tamilnadu was hit by cyclones twice in the last two months. Apart from giving immediate relief to the affected people, prompt action has also been taken to repair the damage caused by the cyclones.

9. Recognising that strong infrastructure is a pre-requisite for the economic development of the State, this Government has implemented projects for increasing power generation, upgradation of roads, construction of bridges and augmentation of water supply. As a result of these measures, and the industry-friendly policy

adopted by the Government, Tamilnadu has attracted large industrial investments and has emerged as one of the leading states in the country.

10. An Information Technology revolution is successfully taking place in Tamilnadu without much fanfare. Consequently, the number of software development firms as well as software production and exports are growing. The Government has been encouraging large scale private sector investment to establish a high speed optic fibre cable network. This basic facility will enable the spread of Information Technology throughout the state. To promote establishment of software firms and generation of employment opportunities not only at Chennai and Coimbatore, but in other parts of the state as well, Satellite Earth Stations are being established at Madurai and Thiruchirappalli. A Point of Presence linked to the Madurai Earth Station is also being set up at Tirunelveli. The magnificent Tidel Park set up with all modern facilities at Taramani in Chennai is functioning successfully. Consequently, the Government has

decided to create a second Tidel Park close to the existing one. Internet kiosks are now widespread in all towns and cities. Such kiosks will soon come up in villages also. A pilot project will shortly be implemented in Madurai district to provide internet-telephone connectivity in villages based on indigenous wireless technology developed by Indian Institute of Technology in Chennai. This will be the first of its kind in India.

11. I am happy to announce that the Tamil Virtual University will be launched in February. This University will enable people all over the world to learn Tamil and to know about the history, art, literature and culture of the Tamil people using the Internet.

12. Like the IT revolution, Biotechnology will also play a major role in the coming years in creating job opportunities and improving the standard of living of the people. Hon'ble Members are well aware that in recognition of this fact, this Government has announced a Biotechnology Policy and has set an

example for other states. For the first time in India, a Biotechnology Park for women entrepreneurs has been set up at Siruseri village near Chennai and it was inaugurated by Hon'ble Chief Minister Kalaignar on 24.11.2000. Following this, the Tamil Nadu Industrial Development Corporation (TIDCO) has signed an MoU with Genome Technologies of USA on 5.12.2000 for setting up a Bio-informatics and Genomics Project in Chennai. Further, an MoU has been signed with the prestigious Cornell University of USA on 15.1.2001 for setting up a Bio-Technology Park in Chennai. This Park will not only foster closer linkages between research institutions and commercial biotechnology enterprises but will also provide a framework for economic development on par with internationally renowned biotechnology parks.

13. In pursuance of the announcement made in the last year's budget speech, the Government of Tamilnadu will embark upon a cooperative venture in Telemedicine with Montefiore Institute of Minimally Invasive Surgery and Telemedicine (MIMISAT) of the

Albert Einstein College of Medicine, New York for providing modern health services to the people. The initial focus would be on improvement of community health services especially for women and children and for providing medical education and training using tele-education technology.

14. Computerisation paves the way for speedy implementation of works, transparency in administration and simplification of procedures. Taking this into account, computerisation of district administration has been taken up and extended to activities such as issue of certificates and distribution of old age pension in 50 Taluk offices. This process will be completed in the remaining 156 Taluks by March, 2001. Besides the 25 offices which have been fully computerised in the Registration department, computerisation of another 100 offices will be completed in a few days time. This work in respect of 200 additional offices is progressing at a rapid pace.

15. Tamilnadu is one of the States in India with a very large urban population. Keeping this in view, this Government has made large investments in providing basic infrastructure such as roads, streetlights, water supply and drainage facilities in urban areas.

The construction of nine flyovers in Chennai, the Ring Road in Madurai and a bridge across the river in Karur are shining examples of the competence of the urban local bodies in taking up major basic infrastructure projects. A massive project at a cost of Rs.1700 crores is being taken up for environmental protection through works such as creating underground sewerage facilities, and desilting of waterways and lakes. This project will be implemented with Central and State assistance in Chennai, Trichy, Madurai, Tirunelveli, Karur, Thanjavur, Tiruvarur, Kumbakonam, Myladuthurai, Rameswaram, Tiruchendur, Udthagamandalam and Kodaikkanal. Hon'ble Members are aware that this project was inaugurated in Chennai by Hon'ble Chief Minister Kalaignar on the 1st of this month.

16. This Government has accorded very high priority to rural development. It has taken action to ensure that 40 litres of water per capita per day is made available in all rural habitations of the State. Since this Government assumed office in 1996, this scheme has been completed in 27,274 habitations. For the first time in the State, cement concrete has been laid on village streets for a length of 5,900 km. at a cost of Rs.472 crores. In addition, a programme for conversion of 22,289 km. of rural link roads to black-topped roads in five years has been taken up and so far, 20,900 km. length of roads have been converted at a cost of Rs.1463 crores. During the current financial year, the Central Government has accorded approval for upgradation of roads under the Prime Minister's Grama Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) in 17 districts in the first phase at a cost of Rs.78.76 crores. It is expected that approval for the remaining districts will be received shortly.

17. Under the Varumun Kappom Thittam, introduced by this Government, specialists in various

medical disciplines are visiting the villages to provide health care to the rural people especially to those living below the poverty line. So far, 84.58 lakh people have benefited through 8481 health camps. Medicines worth Rs.4.58 crores have been distributed to these beneficiaries free of cost. The information obtained under this scheme will provide data about the diseases affecting the people, which will enable effective preventive action against such diseases in the future.

18. Considering the close linkage between livestock and rural life, this Government has introduced a Livestock Protection Scheme to provide free veterinary services in the remote villages of the State. Under this scheme, 4570 camps have been held so far in which 1.07 crores livestock have been given treatment. Medicines worth Rs.1.94 crores have been dispensed free of cost.

19. In order to create linkages between rural and urban economies this Government has formulated and implemented schemes like Uzhavar Sandhai and

Poomalai. The Uzhavar Sandhais are playing a major role in ensuring a better return to the farmer as well as providing increased benefit to the consumer. Since 14.11.1999, 100 Uzhavar Sandhais have been started in phases and vegetables worth Rs.160 crores have been sold through them so far. The Poomalai Scheme is helping the rural artisans get a fair price for their products.

20. The Namakku Naame Thittam, which is one of the most important schemes of this Government, has met with an overwhelming response from the public. With the Government providing Rs.98.15 crores and the public contributing Rs.52.76 crores, the Namakku Naame Thittam continues to be implemented as a scheme of the people, by the people and for the people. Further, under the Anna Marumalarchi Thittam, this Government has provided all basic amenities such as education, roads, drinking water and public health in 844 villages at a cost of Rs.694 crores. Moreover, under the MLA Constituency Development Scheme, each constituency has been allotted Rs.77 lakhs during

the current year. No other State in the country has provided such a large amount. I am very happy to inform you that the works under this scheme are progressing speedily and effectively. With the objective of creating a casteless society, this Government has been setting up Periyar Ninaivu Samathuvapurams. So far, 98 Samathuvapurams have been inaugurated and another 20 are ready for inauguration. The Government is taking effective action on the recommendations of the High Level Commission headed by Justice Ratnavel Pandian constituted to formulate schemes for generation of employment opportunities and overall development of the southern districts.

21. Many schemes of this Government are being drawn up with the farmer as the focus. To ensure self sufficiency in food production, adequate returns to the farming community and increased agricultural productivity, this Government has accorded high priority to wasteland development as well as management and conservation of soil and water resources. With this

in mind, a massive scheme of desilting rivers, canals, tanks and drainage structures is under implementation. So far, since 1997-98, 907 tanks and 10,637 k.m. length of rivers, canals and drainage structures have been taken up for desilting at a cost of Rs.178.65 crores. This programme will continue. In the year 2000-2001, 30,000 hectares are being covered under wasteland development.

22. It is important not only to develop irrigation potential but also to maintain the existing irrigation sources properly. Hon'ble Members are well aware that an Act has been passed to form Water Users' Associations and to entrust the responsibility of operation and maintenance of irrigation sources to these farmers associations. As a follow up, the Government will provide all help including financial assistance to enable these associations to discharge the responsibilities vested in them.

23. As already announced by this Government, the "Tamil Nadu Manual Workers Social

Security and Welfare Board" has been set up to provide social security for more than 60 categories of manual workers in the unorganised sector. Furthermore, 11 separate boards have been set up for the welfare of different categories of unorganised labour. All these labour welfare schemes will be implemented through a Social Security Fund to be created for this purpose.

24. The progress in the implementation of the Mahalir Thittam, named in memory of Perarignar Anna's mother Bangaru Ammaiyaar, is indeed gratifying. This scheme which facilitates socio-economic empowerment of women was started in the rural areas of 28 districts and has subsequently been extended to the Town Panchayats and Municipalities. More than 10 lakh women have benefited so far through 58,391 self-help groups. The Savings-Linked Micro Credit Scheme introduced by this Government exclusively for women engaged in small businesses in Corporation areas has since been extended to municipal towns and rural areas. As on date, 1.59 lakh women have received loan assistance to the extent of Rs.20.02 crores.

25. This Government is effectively implementing the elementary education programme which seeks to impart free and compulsory education to all children upto Class V. The concept of "joyful learning" has been introduced in primary schools to motivate all children to join schools and continue their education. Primary schools are being established so that all villages with a population of more than 300 have access to a school within a distance of 1 km. Tamilnadu is the first state in the country to provide computer education in all Government Higher Secondary Schools. Under this scheme, 60,851 students are being trained during the current year. The computer education scheme has been launched for the students of Government Colleges this year.

26. This Government has been showing great concern in protecting the social rights of Adidraavidars, Scheduled Tribes, Backward Classes, Most Backward Classes and Denotified Communities. Not only has a White Paper on reservation been brought out, steps have also been taken to clear the backlog in

appointments in five years. Orders have been issued to fill up such posts wherever there are provisions for direct recruitment. The progress in this regard is being monitored by a Committee headed by the Chief Secretary. Out of the total of 11,264 backlog posts to be filled up, the target for the current year is 2,250. ~~During the year~~So far, 2,374 posts have been filled up in all the four categories, namely, A, B, C and D. I am very happy to inform that among these, 1,467 belong to the Adidravidar community, 217 to Scheduled Tribes and 690 to Most Backward Classes.

27. Keeping in view the important role played by Government employees in discharging developmental as well as regulatory responsibilities, this Government has extended the Central pay scales to its employees and pensioners with retrospective effect inspite of financial constraints. In addition it has paid enhanced dearness allowance and Pongal bonus to the employees.

28. I have presented before you the policies, programmes and achievements of this Government. While we can look back with pride on this splendid record, let us strive to maintain similar progress in the future as well.

29. I conclude this address with the firm belief that the ensuing debate will serve to strengthen our democratic ethos and tradition.

VANAKKAM

JAI HIND