

Honourable Members of the Legislative Assembly,

It gives me great pleasure to address the first session of the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly for the year 2002. I extend my greetings to all of you for the New Year. This is my first address to the distinguished Members of this august House after I took over as Governor of Tamil Nadu. I take this opportunity to thank you for your warm welcome and assure you of my unstinted support and co-operation in the development and prosperity of the State.

2. After all the turbulent events in Tamil Nadu in the year 2001, I welcome Selvi J Jayalalithaa back as the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu and hope that the State will witness all-round growth and prosperity under her able and dynamic leadership.

3. India is an ancient civilization with myriad cultures, languages and history. Despite the diversity, we cannot miss the clear sense of oneness that binds us as a nation. The attack on the Indian Parliament on

December 13, 2001, by terrorist and subversive elements, was an assault on our sovereignty and nationhood. I strongly condemn the senseless act of violence and convey the heartfelt sympathies of the people of Tamil Nadu to the families of the security personnel who laid down their lives in defence of the citadel of democracy. This Government will extend its full support to the Government of India in the fight against terrorism, especially in the endeavour to enact a national legislation for prevention of terrorism.

4. The recent communal disturbances in Western India, particularly in Gujarat, have led to the loss of lives of innocent people, especially women and children. While the people of Tamil Nadu join me in condoling the death of our brothers and sisters, we strongly condemn the perpetrators of this inhuman carnage. The people of this State have stood by the time-tested principles of communal amity and brotherhood and assisted the Government in maintaining peace and tranquillity. This Government will continue to give the highest priority to maintenance of law and order in the State.

5. It has been widely reported in the media that the LTTE has sought the assistance of the Government of India in negotiations with the Sri Lankan Government and has requested that the LTTE ideologue Anton Balasingam and his wife could be based at Chennai to facilitate peace talks. This Government has categorically conveyed its opposition to any such move to the Government of India.

6. The recent unseasonal torrential rains in the coastal regions of Thanjavur, Thiruvarur, Nagapattinam, Pudukkottai and Cuddalore resulted in the loss of human lives and caused extensive damage to the standing paddy and other crops. This Government immediately sanctioned Rs 49 crores as assistance from the Calamity Relief Fund based on the norms fixed by the Central Government. We are aware that this amount is not sufficient to compensate the heavy loss suffered by the farmers in the delta region. The Government of India has been requested to provide additional relief urgently to ameliorate the sufferings of the affected people.

7. A precarious situation is emerging whereby the agricultural lands depending on the Cauvery irrigation system may be rendered dry since Tamil Nadu is yet to get its share of water through periodical releases as stipulated in the interim award of the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal. Honourable Members are aware that this Government has steadfastly been standing its ground on the Cauvery Water dispute. We expect that the Central Government will take an impartial view on this issue. We shall continue to press for the establishment of a technical committee with powers to monitor the implementation of the interim award of the Tribunal. It is also necessary that proper rules and regulations be immediately framed for this purpose. This Government will plead before the Supreme Court to allow the height of the Mullai Periyar Dam to be raised to 142 feet initially, in accordance with the findings of an expert committee set up by the Union Government, and to 152 feet subsequently. We hope that the 'Krishna Water Scheme' will be completed at the earliest with the co-operation of the Government of Andhra Pradesh.

8. In fulfilment of its commitment to rejuvenating grass root democracy in the State, this

Government has successfully conducted free and fair elections to all the three tiers of Panchayat Raj institutions. The elections to the co-operative institutions in the State could not be conducted due to over-riding administrative problems. This Government is taking necessary steps to hold elections to the co-operative institutions soon.

9. The Government is examining the recommendations made by the Second State Finance Commission for the period 2002-07 comprising devolution of resources from the State Government to Local Bodies, measures for improving their internal resources and the quality of services being provided by them. The decisions on these recommendations will be announced and necessary provisions will be made in the budget for the next financial year.

10. If the Constitutional mandate of democratic decentralization is to be achieved, special emphasis has to be given to capacity building and improving the quality of participation in our Local Bodies.

A comprehensive plan for training the newly elected

representatives for improving the process of decision making in Local Bodies is being drawn up so that they are able to play their due role in the overall development of their areas.

11. Tamil Nadu has been denied its fair share in the devolution of Central funds by successive Finance Commissions constituted by the Government of India. This Government will insist that the Twelfth Finance Commission should adopt a more rational and equitable mechanism for devolution, which would lay greater emphasis on parameters such as tax effort, good governance, achievement of various indicators like population control, per capita income and infrastructure growth. The main aim will be to ensure that Tamil Nadu is not penalized for being more progressive in socio-economic development.

12. Honourable Members are well aware of the serious financial crisis that was prevailing at the time this Government assumed office. As a first step towards delineating the extent and causes of the problem, the Government placed a 'White Paper on Tamil Nadu Government's Finances' on the table of the House in the

last budget session. This was followed by the constitution of a Staff and Expenditure Review Commission and the announcement of a series of reform measures aimed at cutting down non-plan expenditure of the Government.

13. These measures have not been sufficient to reverse the erosion in fiscal health of the State, which has sharply deteriorated in the last few years. The Central Government's decision to reduce the Share of Central Taxes by Rs. 512 crores in the current year, at a time when the State is reeling under a severe financial crisis, has come as a rude shock. The fall in the growth of commercial tax collections of the State Government in the current financial year, which is attributed to the prevailing recession in the national economy, especially in the manufacturing sector, has compounded our problems. This problem is not peculiar to Tamil Nadu alone. The recession in the economy has had its impact on the finances of other States also, thereby forcing a number of States to cut down their Plan outlay drastically.

14. The Government had announced a Plan outlay of Rs 6040 crores for the current financial year. Given the drastic reduction in the receipts of the State Government, the aforesaid outlay can be achieved only by mobilizing additional resources. This may not be a feasible option since the current financial year would soon be coming to a close. Under these circumstances and after considering all the options available, this Government has decided to prune the approved Plan outlay for Tamil Nadu for the year 2001-02 to a realistic level of Rs.5200 crores.

15. While taking necessary action to rectify the fiscal imbalance, the Government will simultaneously pursue the agenda for development. The Honourable Chief Minister, Selvi J Jayalalithaa has announced her commitment to make Tamil Nadu the best State in the country in every sphere. "To provide opportunities for a healthy and productive life for all" will be the goal of this Government. This vision will be realised through the implementation of the Chief Minister's 15-point programme which will encompass the following:

- (i) Evergreen Revolution: Raising farm productivity in perpetuity; Saving every drop of rain; More crop per drop.
- (ii) Food Security: Physical, economic and social access to balanced diets to every child, woman and man.
- (iii) Livestock Security: Upgradation of livestock, better veterinary care; Supplementing farm income; Improving fish diversity and increasing fish density.
- (iv) Water Security: Safe drinking water and adequate water for agriculture, industry and ecosystem maintenance.
- (v) Health Security: Control of all preventable diseases including leprosy, tuberculosis, preventable blindness, and eradication of diseases for which effective vaccines are available; reduction in birth and death rates and increase in average life span; Reduction of Infant Mortality Rate (IMR), Maternal

Mortality Rate (MMR) and incidence of low birth weight children; Adoption of a maternal and child care code; Fight against HIV/AIDS; Special attention to physically and mentally handicapped children, women and men.

- (vi) Livelihood Security: "Work for all" and transition from unskilled to skilled work; Integrated attention to rural on-farm and non-farm employment as well as to micro-enterprises supported by micro-credit; A New Deal to the self-employed through technology, training, techno-infrastructure and domestic and external trade.
- (vii) Shelter Security: Promotion of housing activities designed to harvest sun and rain so that solar energy capture and rainwater harvesting become everybody's business.
- (viii) Ecological Security: Conservation and enhancement of life support systems like land, water, forests, biodiversity, ocean

and the atmosphere; Recycling of solid and liquid wastes and composting of all organic wastes; Safe disposal of hospital wastes; Bio-environmental control of malaria.

- (ix) Energy Security: Building sustainable energy systems with concurrent attention to thermal, hydro, nuclear and renewable forms of energy like wind, solar, biogas and biomass; Energy self-sufficiency for the farm, industrial and domestic sectors.
- (x) Infrastructure for Development: Provision of basic amenities in rural and urban areas; Connectivity to all habitations with population above 500; Bridging the rural-urban divide.
- (xi) Literacy and Techniracy: Attention to quality improvement in education ranging from the pre-school to University; Special attention to the technological and skill empowerment of

illiterate or semi-literate women and men; Eradication of child labour.

- (xii) Folk, classical and modern arts, culture and drama: Generation of awareness and appreciation of the cultural heritage of Tamil Nadu and revitalisation of cultural traditions, including the street theatre.
- (xiii) Gender Equity: Removal of gender bias, elimination of adverse sex ratio, and support services to working women, taking into account the multiple burden on a woman's day-to-day life.
- (xiv) New Deal for the Oppressed Classes: Educational and economic empowerment of the Adi-Dravidas, Scheduled Tribes, Backward Classes, Most Backward Classes and Denotified Tribes.
- (xv) Technological Leapfrogging: Promotion of research and development in frontier areas of science and technology like biotechnology and information

technology, coordination of efforts between academic know how and field level do how. Launching a movement for fostering greater public understanding of science and promoting a new social contact between scientists and society; providing equal attention to connectivity and content in efforts to bridge the digital divide; including access to appropriate technologies in the basic minimum needs programme.

The Chief Minister's 15-point programme outlined here will be the road map for this Government in the next four years. It will be the endeavour of this Government to realise this vision by March 2006.

16. In order to rejuvenate the agricultural economy, this Government will focus on increasing production and productivity by adopting appropriate crop patterns, scientific nutrient and water management techniques, modernization and expansion of irrigation facilities and effective marketing of farm products. I am happy to announce that this Government has

already begun implementing its promise to reclaim vast tracts of wasteland for agricultural use. A Watershed Development Agency will implement this massive programme by sourcing external funds. Development of 1,35,905 acres of wasteland in 10 districts has already been taken up, which includes identification of wasteland, preparation of plans for each watershed and raising of nurseries. The thrust will be on increasing the ground water potential to enable better irrigation and cultivation of crops, which can find profitable markets. Cultivation and marketing of medicinal plants and herbs, and organic farming will be encouraged in a big way.

17. A Wasteland Development Authority with the Honourable Chief Minister as the chairperson has been constituted in order to decide on policy and co-ordination aspects of different wasteland development programmes under implementation. Similarly, the task of promotion of agri-business and food processing has been entrusted to the Department of Agricultural Marketing, which has been renamed as Department of Agricultural Marketing and Agri-Business. I am happy to announce that the first Agri-export Processing Zone in Tamil Nadu for cut flowers will soon be established at Hosur.

Studies are also underway for setting up similar Agri-export Processing Zones and Agri-Business Centres in various districts of the State.

18. Horticulture is slowly emerging as the growth engine of the agricultural sector in recent years. This Government proposes to set up a Mission for Horticulture Development in Tamil Nadu to give an impetus to cultivation, processing for value addition, and marketing of vegetables, fruits and flowers in the State. The mission mode would involve integration of various aspects of horticulture development from plantation to marketing with special emphasis on dry land horticulture, conservation of water through drip irrigation and establishment of Agro-economic and Export Processing Zones for post harvest storage and marketing of horticultural produce.

19. Livestock development will receive the special attention of the Government so that this can play an important role in increasing the supplementary income of rural households. Given the adverse effect of Foot and Mouth Disease on cattle and its consequent economic impact on farmers, it is proposed to inoculate

all susceptible livestock in the State against this contagious viral disease. A new scheme for cattle and buffalo breeding will be implemented during the Tenth Plan Period at a cost of Rs 93 crores. In order to enhance the coverage of veterinary care and breeding facilities of livestock and poultry, this Government proposes to source the services of unemployed veterinary graduates by evolving suitable self-employment schemes.

20. Tamil Nadu has a long coastline with a large potential for employment generation in the fisheries sector. The Government proposes to set up [aa](#) Fisheries Development Mission with the aim of giving a fillip to their production and export, by increasing the area coverage (marine and inland) in an environmentally sustainable manner. Special attention will be given to increasing offshore fish density in order to enhance the income of small marine fishermen. The Mission will explore the possibilities of increasing inland fish production by evolving innovative measures such as fisheries development in abandoned mines and quarries, paddy-cum-fish farms, development of model fishing villages etc.

21. Honourable Members are aware that the drinking water crisis in Chennai city during 2001 was managed very successfully. This Government is keen to find a long-term solution to the recurrent problem of water shortage in the State by adopting a multi-pronged approach.

- In order to achieve this objective, a massive programme for rainwater harvesting has been launched. It will be mandatory for all Government-owned buildings and those belonging to educational institutions and Local Bodies, as also newly constructed private buildings, to have necessary structures for recharging ground water.
- In order to ameliorate the water problems of Chennai, the Government has already sanctioned the implementation of Chennai Water Supply Augmentation Project I (Veeranam Project). The Chennai Water Supply Augmentation Project II, which involves construction of new storage reservoirs and check dams across the Palar, Kotralaiyar and Adayar rivers and deepening and

desilting of tanks around Chennai, will be taken up for implementation in 2002-03.

- A new scheme, Tamil Nadu Water Supply and Sanitation Project for Rural Areas, aimed at providing water supply and sanitation facilities to rural areas of certain water deficient districts in the State, at an estimated cost of Rs 2300 crores, has been cleared by the Union Planning Commission and posed to the World Bank for appraisal.

22. A massive project for desilting and deepening of all existing medium and minor irrigation tanks is being formulated and will be implemented with external funding. This project will also include construction of new check dams, percolation ponds etc., for raising the ground water table, which will cater to the irrigation and drinking water needs of the people. The Central Government will be urged to take up the implementation of the 'Peninsular River Water Grid Scheme' and in the first phase to connect the rivers Mahanadhi, Godavari, Krishna, Pennar, Gundar, Cauvery and Vaigai. This will ensure fruitful utilization

of water from the perennial rivers, which otherwise run waste into the sea and also give a boost to the rural economy in Tamil Nadu. In order to develop the irrigation systems in the Southern districts of Tamil Nadu, the Government of India will be requested to implement a project connecting Pamba, Achankoil and Vaippar link.

23. The Government has decided to formulate a comprehensive Health Policy that would encourage private sector participation and ensure that quality and affordable health services are made available to all citizens. Absence of disease is the best indicator of improved health status of the people. Specific attention will be given to improving the infrastructure facilities in peripheral hospitals so as to prevent over-crowding in city hospitals. Primary health care in urban areas will receive special attention of the Government in the next financial year.

24. The Government will encourage private sector participation in the development of alternative systems of medicine like Ayurveda, Siddha, Unani, Acupuncture therapy etc. Existing infrastructure for

alternative systems of medicine will be strengthened in the districts and new infrastructure will be created wherever they do not exist.

25. The programme of this Government to construct Integrated Sanitary Complexes for women has been well received within and outside the State. Thrust will be given to the construction and maintenance of pay and use Integrated Sanitary Complexes in Chennai and other urban areas with external assistance and private sector participation. A new scheme for providing underground drainage system in major urban areas and important centres will be taken up for implementation.

26. Infrastructure development and poverty alleviation will be the thrust areas for the Government in the year 2002-03. It is an accepted fact that quality infrastructure accelerates the growth of agricultural and industrial sectors, which in turn leads to creation of gainful employment for the people. In order to ensure that the poor and the deprived sections of our society are not left behind, this Government will retain its primary and direct role in alleviation of poverty, especially in the rural areas. The goal of this Government is to ensure

that there is no family below the poverty line beyond March 2006.

27. Provision of adequate infrastructure in the rural areas has a multiplier effect in transforming the quality of rural life and economy. Rural development will therefore continue to be one of the highest priorities of the Government. Due attention will be paid to agro-industries in rural areas in the small and cottage sectors to ensure value addition to agricultural produce. This will assure remunerative returns to farmers and also provide employment opportunities to agricultural labourers.

28. Increasing accessibility and connectivity within and among rural areas is an important pre-requisite for rural development. This Government will strive to provide total connectivity by forming all-weather roads in all rural habitations with a population of more than five hundred people by 2004.

29. 'Poverty alleviation' is not just about providing subsistence income, food, clothing and shelter to those below the poverty line. It means and includes provision of opportunities for gainful employment in the

agricultural, manufacturing and service sectors to those below the poverty line. This Government will endeavour to strengthen employment opportunities in the non-farm sector especially in areas of handlooms, handicrafts, sericulture development and other rural industries. The rural artisan groups will be protected from de-skilling through constant efforts at improving their skill levels and value addition to their products. Avenues for aggressive marketing of products will be encouraged to ensure decent returns to those employed in this sector. In order to give a boost to export of products manufactured in the State, Export Guidance Cells will be set up at the district level.

30. All efforts will be made to modernize the agricultural, manufacturing and service sectors so that they generate gainful employment and increase self-employment potential for the youth in rural and urban areas. At least one focal agro-industry based economic activity, which has the potential for sustainability and capacity for generating employment opportunities, will be nurtured in each of the 385 blocks of the State.

31. This Government has kept its election promise of reinstating price and purchase preference hitherto enjoyed by the small-scale industries in Government procurements, which was withdrawn in 1997. The Government firmly believes that this decision will provide a kick-start to the revival of the flagging small industries sector in the State. While the Government will surely do what it can to create the necessary conducive environment for growth of industries in this sector, it is imperative that our entrepreneurs realize the high stakes in this new era of globalization and competition. The SSI units will have to take steps to put their own house in order by adoption of suitable cost effective technology and enhancing product competitiveness in the market.

32. Tamil Nadu boasts of tremendous intellectual potential, much of which lies untapped. A new Department of Special Initiatives and Projects to process innovative schemes that emanate from different sources will be created and will function under the direct supervision of the Honourable Chief Minister.

33. The Government is very concerned about the implications of the WTO agreements on the primary, secondary and tertiary sectors of the economy. A WTO Cell will be constituted to study the ramifications of trade liberalization under the aegis of the WTO, especially on the agriculture and textile sectors and small-scale industries. This Cell comprising experts from trade, agriculture and academic institutions will, on a continuous basis, evolve strategies for getting the maximum advantages from WTO in terms of exports and increase in the volume of trade and commerce. We will ensure that the Union Government consults all States while taking decisions based on WTO-bindings so that we can harness our comparative advantages and also protect the vital interests of our farmers and entrepreneurs.

34. Increased power generation is an essential factor for continued growth and development of industry, commerce and agriculture. Honourable Members are well aware of the concern of this Government over the poor financial position of the TNEB. A Memorandum of Understanding has been signed between the State Government and the

Government of India on major reforms in the power sector on 9.1.2002. Necessary steps are being taken to activate the State Electricity Regulatory Commission.

35. The public transport network is another crucial infrastructure area, which will receive high priority attention of the Government. The Government proposes to go in for a phased privatization of select routes, services and operations in the bus-transport sector. The proposed comprehensive restructuring of the cash-strapped STUs coupled with private sector participation will encourage healthy competition and efficiency in the public transport system.

36. Tamil Nadu has been pleading for early implementation of the Sethu Samudram Project for a long time. We urge the Central Government to expedite the implementation of this project, which can make a major difference to the development of the Southern districts of Tamil Nadu.

37. The challenge of achieving the goal of free and universal primary education still remains a distant dream. In order to achieve the objective 'Elementary Education for all', this Government is determined to

ensure 100 percent enrolment of all children by the end of 2003 and their retention till they complete 14 years of age. Schemes to enable children in habitations without schools within a range of 1-km to have access to education will be implemented.

38. The Government has decided to start Institutionalized Vocational Training Schools in every district to cater to the needs of those boys and girls from families below the poverty line who need to be taught skills for gainful employment. These schools will impart basic education and intensive vocational training in agriculture, gardening, masonry, carpentry, plumbing, electrical works etc. Boarding and lodging facilities and clothing will be made available to these children.

39. “A healthy mind in a healthy body” should be the underlying theme of all educational schemes. Towards this, a new scheme called the Young Talent Scheme will be introduced in all high schools and higher secondary schools from the next academic year. Under this scheme, at least one extra-curricular activity, physical or academic, will be made compulsory. In addition, every school will be required to develop

proficiency in at least one sporting activity. Annual sporting competitions will be organized to spot young talent.

40. The transparent method of transferring teachers through counselling adopted by this Government has eliminated corruption. Tamil Nadu is the first State to implement this scheme, which has been well received by the teaching community and has won acclaim throughout the country. While continuing this policy, the Government will also undertake redeployment of surplus teachers to the needy areas.

41. This Government has vowed to make Tamil Nadu one of the most favoured tourist destinations in India. Apart from substantially increasing the allocation for this sector in the current year's budget, necessary steps are also being taken to solicit private sector participation in tourism promotion activities. Master Plans for providing infrastructural facilities of international standards in Mahabalipuram and Kanyakumari are being prepared. It shall be our endeavour to promote 'village tourism' among domestic

and foreign tourists in order to popularize the rich cultural heritage of our State.

42. Just as the Statue of Liberty symbolizes the spirit of American freedom and democracy, a “Garden of Peace” with a statue symbolizing communal, religious and cultural harmony, will be established on the outskirts of Chennai city. This complex will house a huge convention hall, a large meditation hall with symbols of all religions, a library and a bookstore devoted exclusively to books relating to different religions. This project will be made a living embodiment of universal peace and a tourist spot patronized by Indians and foreigners alike.

43. The river Cooum in Chennai, which is today nothing more than a massive open drain, requires to be dredged, de-silted and made free flowing. A comprehensive scheme will be drawn up to make it a serviceable inland waterway devoid of pollutants, with nurseries and gardens on the banks.

44. This Government is committed to increasing the use of Tamil in day-to-day administration. We will continue to voice our support for the

two-language policy of Tamil and English formulated by Perarignar Anna. Every school in the State will be required to ensure that Tamil is taught as a subject in the curriculum.

45. An “Annadhaanam” scheme to provide a free mid-day meal to devotees will be started in select temples with donor participation. A separate hundi will be kept in these temples for inviting contributions from the devotees. To start with, this programme will be initiated with temple funds. All these temples will also organize classes every Sunday for at least one hour to impart spiritual and moral education to children.

46. Honourable Members are aware that Women's Day was celebrated yesterday the world over. In order to give a thrust to women's education and research in women-related issues, it is proposed to affiliate all women's colleges in the region with Mother Teresa Women's University at Kodaikanal. Necessary infrastructure will also be created at the University in the next two years.

47. This Government is keen to involve women in a major way in the formulation of all developmental

programmes so that they not only make a significant contribution but also reap the benefits from these schemes. As promised, necessary orders for reserving 33 percent seats for women in all statutory and non-statutory committees of the State Government have been issued. A massive programme for training 5 lakh women entrepreneurs in various avocations of self-employment over a period of five years is being implemented. As a follow up, women's self-employment schemes will be implemented extensively in the State to secure their economic empowerment. This will include financial assistance through credit institutions, technical-aid and facilities for marketing their products.

48. Special attention will be paid to the welfare of the other vulnerable sections of our society such as children, the physically and mentally challenged and the aged. The Government will encourage the private sector to set up orphanages, homes for the aged, disabled, destitutes and night shelters for street children and would consider providing land free of cost to those who come forward to take up this scheme on a non-profit basis.

49. This Government realizes its primary role in empowerment and development of the depressed sections of our society, especially those belonging to the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Backward Classes, Most Backward Classes and Denotified Tribes. Concerted action will be taken for the welfare of people belonging to these communities in the fields of education, economic upliftment and provision of basic amenities. Preference will also be given to these disadvantaged sections in the provision of opportunities for self-employment. It is a matter of great satisfaction that the new scheme for providing free bicycles to Adi-Dravida and Scheduled Tribe girl students studying in plus one and plus two classes in Government schools has been well received by the people. This scheme will be continued in the next year.

50. A new University, which will focus on the economic and social upliftment of oppressed classes, including Adi-Dravidas, Scheduled Tribes, Backward Classes, Most Backward Classes and Denotified Tribes, will be set up at Vellore. Named after the great Tamil

savant Thiruvalluvar, this University will be a unique and pioneering effort at social transformation.

51. The New Industrial Policy, which will be announced in the budget session, will focus on attracting foreign and domestic private investments through adoption of transparent and entrepreneur friendly policies. The textile industry, which is an important source of employment, will be given an impetus by evolving appropriate forward and backward linkages comprising increased productivity of cotton and technology upgradation in textile processing.

52. Considering the fact that biotechnology is emerging as a frontier area in the field of science, fresh impetus and focus will be given to this field by the Government. Investments from leading companies in life sciences and biotechnology will be invited and conditions conducive for such investments will be created for improving the health status of the people.

53. In today's world, information has become a crucial input in all aspects of generation of wealth and employment. Information technology by itself and through its enabled services has become an engine of

economic growth, the –world over. The aim of this Government is to give renewed thrust to the development of IT and IT-enabled services in order to ensure that Tamil Nadu achieves a pre-eminent position in the country. To achieve this end, the Government's IT-policy would include the following:

- a) Generation of employment opportunities and wealth through call centres, software and hardware development in urban areas and through the IT-enabled services for those living in rural and semi-urban areas. Thrust will be on ensuring quality IT-enabled services through primary co-operative societies in rural areas.
- b) Co-ordination with all Government Departments / agencies for sectoral and cross-sectoral induction and use of IT in governance.
- c) Co-ordination and networking with agriculture, trade and industrial sectors to promote all-round growth and

- d) Identification of core areas for further research and development in this sector through public-private participation.

54. Keeping in mind the old adage “Justice delayed is justice denied”, this Government will work along with the judiciary to ensure speedy and quality disposal of cases. The Tamil Nadu Government has constituted 49 Fast Track Courts and they have all started functioning. These institutions are being provided with necessary infrastructure including staff that will help to considerably reduce the number of long pending cases in the District Courts and provide speedy justice to the people.

55. Given the high expectations of the people, this Government has an onerous task on hand. On the economic front, the Government is placed in an unenviable position of having to take hard decisions in the best interests of the State. This will include cutting down non-productive expenditure, targeting of subsidies to benefit the poor and the needy, making public sector undertakings more accountable, disinvesting in units for better deployment of these resources and closing down

institutions which have proved to be a drag on the tax payers' money. The Government will like to send out a clear message to all the financial institutions that it will shed its non-reformist image created in the last few years and put the finances of the State Government back on the rails with minimum adverse impact on the poor.

56. The State Government will be signing a Memorandum of Understanding with the Government of India on a Medium Term Fiscal Reform Programme to access funds from the Fiscal Reforms Facility set up by the Central Government, based on the recommendations of the Eleventh Finance Commission. If the reform programme is to succeed, the Government of India will have to support the States adequately. In the spirit of true federalism, the Union Government should come forward to share more revenues with the States which are starved of funds. We will urge the Central Government to amend the Constitution and allow the States to tax the services sector.

57. This Government recognises the invaluable contribution of the Government servants, including teachers, in the development of the State. I am happy to

place on record my appreciation of the understanding shown by them in managing the present financial crisis.

58. With a view to reducing expenditure and improving administrative efficiency, this Government has decided to merge Ariyalur district with Perambalur district. The headquarters of the enlarged Perambalur district will be at Perambalur. However, some important District level offices will be located at Ariyalur.

59. E-governance is being implemented in many departments of the Government, like Registration, Revenue, Transport etc. This will be extended to include all other departments. Video conferencing facility will be made available in all districts and used extensively in administration. Advisory Councils for key Departments such as agriculture, industry, education, social welfare etc., will be constituted comprising eminent experts from the private sector, citizen groups and NGOs to appraise existing Government programmes, suggest new policies and suitable changes on a regular basis.

60. In order to accelerate implementation of all major Government schemes at the district level, it has been decided to appoint Secretaries to Government as Monitoring Officers. Each Secretary will be assigned one district. In addition, a Minister will be assigned to one or more districts to provide leadership in respect of these programmes.

61. I have outlined the policy direction that this Government proposes to take during the course of the year in this address to you. The people have reposed their confidence in you, while electing you as their representatives in this august Assembly. I am sure that your deliberations in the House will undoubtedly facilitate the Government to properly plan and take necessary steps for accelerating the socio-economic development of the State.

Vanakkam