

Honourable Members of the Legislative Assembly,

It gives me great pleasure to address you at the commencement of the first session of the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly for the year 2004. I extend my greetings and good wishes to all of you.

2. The people of India are to elect their representatives to Parliament shortly. The elections to the Lok Sabha bring the people of India together in electing a Government that will take them on the road to development and prosperity. The people of India, Tamil Nadu in particular, have always exercised tremendous political acumen and sagacity in exercising their political franchise. They are going to get another opportunity soon. I urge the people of Tamil Nadu to carry our rich and vibrant democratic traditions forward and exercise their franchise in a peaceful manner.

3. Tamil Nadu welcomed the New Year with renewed confidence and hope of a glorious

future ahead. The State has cast aside the inherited legacy of poor growth prospects and a crippled fiscal situation. The year 2003 marks a spectacular turnaround. By successfully integrating reform priorities with development imperatives and above all keeping the interests of the poor uppermost, Tamil Nadu has indeed emerged as the State, which will forge ahead towards its cherished numero uno position. The credit for this amazing and unparalleled turnaround in such a short span of time goes to the Hon'ble Chief Minister Selvi J Jayalalithaa.

4. Hon'ble Members of this House may recall the extremely difficult fiscal situation prevailing when this Government assumed office in May 2001, forcing this Government to scale down the Plan outlay to Rs. 5200 crores in 2001-2002. The future looked bleak, given the extent and gravity of the fiscal crisis. Since then a bold economic reforms programme implemented with resolve and courage by the Chief Minister has enabled the Government to increase the Plan size to Rs. 7000 crores in 2003-2004 and draw up an impressive Tenth Plan with an outlay of

Rs. 40,000 crores. A comprehensive social safety net has been put in place and strengthened despite the fiscal stress. Public utilities such as the Tamil Nadu Electricity Board and the State Transport Undertakings have been restored to financial viability. The problem of huge unpaid liabilities inherited from the previous Government amounting to Rs. 4000 crores has been resolved. Tamil Nadu's turnaround is nothing short of a miracle.

5. The Chief Minister Selvi J Jayalalithaa has clearly set out the economic reform priorities of the Government, which consist of fiscal reforms to ensure fiscal correction and sustainability, reforms to improve the investment climate, improvements to service delivery through good governance and a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy. The State has successfully warded off the danger of a debilitating fiscal crisis and at the same time taken up planned development. This complex adjustment process in Tamil Nadu has a human face, keeping the interests of the poor foremost in mind.

6. The World Bank, which had moved away from Tamil Nadu earlier, has now evinced keen interest in assisting the State Government in putting through its economic reforms programme. It is anticipated that funding support from the World Bank for this programme will be made available over several years. This will be in addition to project-based assistance. The World Bank has commended the new initiatives of this Government in the primary sector and the second-generation reforms announced in the New Industrial Policy in September 2003 to improve the investment climate. The World Bank has recognized that Tamil Nadu is a forerunner in providing a comprehensive social safety net, which is the brainchild of the Chief Minister.

7. This Government has had to contend with adverse seasonal conditions over three successive years culminating in the unprecedented drought in 2002-2003 that affected all districts, in the midst of a major fiscal crisis. This daunting challenge would have broken the spirit of any other Government. It behoves to the credit of the Chief Minister that while carrying the fiscal

adjustment process forward, this Government ensured prompt response to every crisis situation with alacrity and provided relief and succour by reaching out to the poor.

8. In 2002, when the landless agricultural labourers in the Cauvery delta districts were affected by lack of work following the refusal of Karnataka to release Tamil Nadu's due share of water from the Cauvery, this Government provided gift hampers to about 10-lakh households at a cost of Rs. 210 per hamper. This was implemented at a cost of Rs. 21 crores. To ward off the prospect of starvation, a special programme was implemented to provide 30-Kg of rice free of cost to every needy rural family every month from February to August 2003. This benefited 9.71 lakh families and was implemented at a cost of Rs. 115.94 crores. When farm incomes were affected, the Government launched a massive scheme for the waiver of interest and penal interest dues of farmers from the co-operative sector at a cost of Rs. 146 crores. The scheme of waiver of interest dues from small and marginal farmers on loans availed of by them from Co-operative Banks announced by the

Government in May 2003 with an outlay of Rs. 20 crores has provided immense relief to farmers during hard times. When handloom weavers were affected because of the crisis in the economy, this Government responded quickly to provide 20-Kg of free rice per month to 22,072 handloom weavers at a cost of Rs. 1.19 crore. These are instances of prompt intervention by this Government to provide relief and support to the poor during hard times, notwithstanding the fiscal crisis confronting it. This goes to show that this Government has been responsive and caring, always concerned about the welfare of the people.

9. The Chief Minister has been at the vanguard of social reforms aimed at conferring real benefits on the poor. The ban on lotteries has been widely welcomed. It is now perceived as an important measure which has rescued the poor from the spectre of rack and ruin. Lakhs of poor people who hitherto spent their entire income on buying lottery tickets inveigled by the promise of an elusive bonanza and ended up in penury are now thanking the Chief Minister for bringing happiness into their lives. The ruination wrought by usurious

moneylenders had reached alarming proportions. This Government enacted amendments to control the exorbitant interest rates and imposed stiff penalties for those deviating from the law. This salutary legislation has brought comfort to rural households, particularly when their incomes were affected by the drought. These measures have enabled people to celebrate Deepavali and Pongal recently with great cheer. Despite being affected by drought and adverse seasonal conditions for three successive years, Tamil Nadu, unlike most other States, has coped most successfully with the crises and has provided relief and succour at every instance of need.

10. Thanks to the personal intervention of the Chief Minister, Indian Missions abroad have been alerted to provide legal assistance to Tamils languishing in prisons in Malaysia and Maldives. Similarly, 380 fishermen and 47 mechanized boats taken into custody by the Sri Lankan Navy have been released by the intervention of the Chief Minister.

11. The Twelfth Finance Commission has just concluded its visit to Tamil Nadu. The Chief Minister has highlighted the need for a complete restructuring of public finances, giving the States their due share. The Government has called for greater resource transfers to the States from the Union by stepping up the Share of States in the Central tax pool from the present level of 29.5% to 50%. The Chief Minister has insisted that the Twelfth Finance Commission should undo the injustice meted out to Tamil Nadu by the Eleventh Finance Commission. States like Tamil Nadu, which perform well, should be rewarded for their efficiency and good governance. Comprehensive proposals on various issues such as debt reduction and restructuring, financing of local bodies and calamity relief have also been made to the Commission. The Commission has been requested to support the Government's effort to modernize the administration and in addressing the special problems of Tamil Nadu. It is hoped that the recommendations of the Twelfth Finance Commission will be more in tune with the needs and aspirations of the people of the State.

12. The Chief Minister has placed the highest emphasis on the perfect maintenance of law and order as the bedrock of the development process. Her strong leadership in Tamil Nadu has kept insidious and disruptive forces at bay and provided the assurance for citizens to feel safe and secure in Tamil Nadu. The connection between strong leadership, successful policing, perfect maintenance of law and order resulting in a favourable investment climate stands highlighted when we compare Tamil Nadu with other States.

13. This transformation of Tamil Nadu as a haven of peace and tranquillity has been brought about by a comprehensive action plan implemented by the Chief Minister. The series of measures initiated by the Chief Minister to improve the efficiency of the Police by way of modernization, improvement of Police logistics, including provision of new buildings, new vehicles and the latest information and communications technology equipment, housing infrastructure and training has enabled the Tamil Nadu Police to become the best State Police Force in India. Effective steps to correct a huge backlog in recruitment of Police

personnel have also been taken and in the current year, 8431 Grade II Men Police Constables and 2306 Grade II Women Constables are being recruited.

14. The Chief Minister's campaign towards gender sensitization and control of crimes against women has been followed up with the establishment of Mobile Counselling Centres in every district. There will be 188 All Women Police Stations across the State before the close of the financial year. The constitution of an exclusive All Women Commando Force and an All Women Police Battalion marks an important milestone in the history of the Tamil Nadu Police. A new office complex for the Director General of Police will be constructed at an estimated cost of Rs. 30 crores in 2004-2005.

15. The Chief Minister has taken pains to ensure that the morale of the Police Force is at its peak through well-designed measures of not only providing them with amenities and benefits, but also by directly addressing their grievances. The Chief Minister personally held five detailed

sessions to hear the grievances of officers and ranks of the Tamil Nadu Police. This has toned up the morale of the Police Force and made it fully prepared to meet any challenge. The grievance redressal machinery for the Police personnel has now been completely revamped and made more meaningful. Creches have been opened in 6 Police Commissionerates for the children of women Police personnel. The Government has sanctioned the construction of 6000 houses for Police personnel during 2001-2003 at a total cost of Rs. 241.61 crores.

16. This Government has sanctioned the construction of a new prison complex with state-of-the-art facilities to house 3000 prisoners at Puzhal at an estimated cost of Rs. 77.09 crores. An outlay of Rs. 19.07 crores has been allotted for the scheme of modernization of prison administration in 2003-2004. Sub-jails at Nagercoil and Dindigul are being upgraded as district jails in this year. Video-conferencing system between prisons and the courts at an estimated cost of Rs. 8.61 crores is also being introduced.

17. The High Court Bench at Madurai constructed at a cost of Rs. 55.59 crores with state-of-the-art facilities will be opened on 13th April, 2004. A total of 49 Fast Track Courts have been set up in Tamil Nadu during 2001-2003. This has enabled a record disposal of nearly 65,000 cases. Construction of Integrated Court Complexes at Theni and Srivilliputhur has also been sanctioned.

18. In the wake of the failure of the Monsoons in 2002 culminating in an unprecedented drought, the Government implemented a massive relief programme. Widely acclaimed, this has protected the people from want and deprivation. Both the South-West and the North-East Monsoon in 2003 were below the forecast, though a little better than the previous year. The State Calamity Relief Fund has already been exhausted. A detailed memorandum on the drought situation has been furnished to the Government of India with a request to sanction Rs. 1584 crores of assistance from the National Calamity Contingency Fund and 10.8 lakh MT of rice for the Food for Work Programme. The Government is hopeful of substantial support from the Government of India for various drought relief

measures. Meanwhile, the Government has sanctioned Rs. 50 crores to alleviate drinking water scarcity problems in the affected districts.

19. The drought situation in Tamil Nadu has been further exacerbated by Karnataka's failure to release the State's genuine entitlement of Cauvery water. Mettur Dam has realized only 60.45 TMC ft of inflows up to the end of January 2004, as against the Tribunal's interim award of 193.59 TMC ft and even 89.771 TMC ft as per the distress sharing formula evolved by the Central Water Commission. Karnataka's repeated failure to abide by the directives of Constitutionally and legally authorized federal dispute settlement mechanisms like the Supreme Court, Cauvery River Authority and the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal is an unhealthy precedent. This Government will not relent in its efforts to take necessary action to enable Tamil Nadu to ultimately realize its legitimate share from the waters of the river Cauvery.

20. Chennai has been facing chronic water scarcity as a result of failure of Monsoons

both in 2002 and 2003. Consequently, the storage levels in the city's reservoirs are the lowest in the last 55 years of recorded history. This Government has taken steps to find long-term solutions. The Chennai Water Supply Augmentation Project-I (New Veeranam Project) will be completed on schedule in May 2004 at a cost of Rs. 730 crores. The Government proposes to establish desalination plants as the only durable solution to Chennai's chronic water shortages. The Chief Minister has written to the Prime Minister for support from the National Calamity Contingency Fund for Rs. 700 crores. The Union Government has already announced an initial assistance of Rs. 50 crores. More assistance is expected after a Central team makes an assessment. Lorry water supply has been stepped up to provide requisite supplies to all areas. Steps are being taken to tap the Araniar-Koratalliyar ground water aquifers to provide water supply. The Government is fully geared to meet the challenge.

21. In a major effort to conserve riverbeds and prevent their degradation by indiscriminate sand quarrying, the Government has successfully

implemented exclusive sand quarrying by the Public Works Department in an orderly manner. These operations will ensure preservation of the environment, protection of our water sources and will also generate more revenue for the Government.

22. The Chief Minister's 15-point programme, which constitutes the development vision of the State, seeks to secure equitable and all round development of Tamil Nadu. I am happy to inform this August House that this Government will achieve in full the Plan outlay of Rs. 7000 crores earmarked for the current financial year. This Government will be approaching the Union Planning Commission for the approval of an enhanced development Plan outlay of Rs. 8001 crores for 2004-2005. This represents a major step up over the development Plan outlay for 2003-2004.

23. Crop diversification with water conservation incorporating new technology has been the guiding principle in restructuring the farm sector. Precision farming to promote these

concepts is being launched in the new Krishnagiri district and Dharmapuri district at a cost of Rs. 7.21 crores. The Government will promote crops like tapioca with precision farming to bring better value addition with lower consumption of water.

24. This Government's Comprehensive Wasteland Development Programme is being widely hailed as a pioneering effort in reclaiming wasteland for productive economic use. The achievements under this programme despite recurrent drought have been very impressive. About 70 lakh saplings have been planted and 1.19 lakh acres of wasteland have been brought under productive economic use till December 2003.

25. The New Anna Marumalarchi Thittam, another visionary effort aimed at encouraging development of rural agro-based industry, is making rapid progress. A total of 695 projects covering 369 blocks have been cleared for implementation. As many as 72 units have already commenced production.

26. The Government's bold initiatives in restructuring the milk co-operative sector in the State have infused new strength into this vital industry. Arrears of payment to dairy farmers amounting to Rs. 34.91 crores have been cleared. Arrears of payment to sugarcane farmers by co-operative and public sector sugar mills totalling Rs. 123.74 crores have been cleared by the intervention of this Government.

27. The welfare of the fishing community in Tamil Nadu has received attention of very high priority of the Government. The Government has sanctioned the construction of 11,389 houses for fishermen since May 2001 at a cost of Rs. 35.87 crores. Nearly 30,192 fisherwomen have been covered for the first time under the Savings cum Relief Scheme with an outlay of Rs. 1.73 crores. The Government is providing 10,000 life saving jackets to fishermen at a cost of Rs. 1 crore to protect them when they are on the high seas.

28. The Chief Minister has launched the path-breaking Rain Water Harvesting movement in

Tamil Nadu. It is only in Tamil Nadu that all buildings in every city, town and village have rainwater-harvesting structures installed. This has been possible because of the commitment of the Chief Minister to putting through this programme mandatorily before the monsoon. In rural areas, rainwater harvesting to recharge ground water is now a major programme. This programme will be continued so that a water-starved State like Tamil Nadu can conserve precious water.

29. I am happy to inform you that Tamil Nadu stands first in utilizing funds under various Centrally Sponsored Schemes for rural development during 2001-2003. The Government of India has released additional funds to the State Government over and above the State's annual allotment during 2001-2003 on account of efficient performance.

30. The Government is ensuring comprehensive coverage under the Total Sanitation Campaign in 28 districts at a project cost of Rs. 327.32 crores. The construction of 12,618 Integrated Sanitary Complexes for women and

children in all the Village Panchayats across the State will be completed within this year at a total cost of Rs. 268.13 crores. The construction of 12,506 offices for Village Administrative Officers across the State will also be completed within 2004 at a total cost of Rs. 77.89 crores.

31. A major programme for upgradation, relaying and special repairs to 5850-Km of Panchayat and Panchayat Union roads that have not been maintained by any agency, including those where buses cannot ply, is being taken up at an estimated cost of Rs. 300 crores. In addition, the Government has also sanctioned Rs. 336.05 crores for improvements to 6492-Kms of Other District Roads, covering in particular, all bus routes. This massive programme will provide lasting benefits to the people and will be widely appreciated. The plan to amalgamate the Tamil Nadu State Transport Corporations into 7 Corporations has been completed. Nearly 2500 buses will be replaced in two phases. An amount of Rs. 30 crores has been allotted to carry out major repairs to 6000 buses.

32. The Government has taken up rural water supply projects with an outlay of Rs. 572.16 crores in 2003-2004. This will enable nearly 6000 habitations to receive potable water supply by March 2004. Nearly 10,000 hand pumps are also being converted into mini-power pumps in the current financial year at a cost of Rs. 60 crores. Five major Combined Water Supply Schemes covering 3912 rural habitations, 21 Town Panchayats and 5 municipalities are being implemented at a total cost of Rs. 463.54 crores.

33. It is gratifying to note that the goal of Universalization of Primary Education and attainment of 100% enrollment in schools is being pursued with unrelenting vigour. During 2001-2003, this Government has opened 1112 elementary schools, 1075 middle schools, 260 high and 300 higher secondary schools. The Government has recruited 10,022 teachers in the last two years. An unprecedented emphasis is being given to upgrading the quality of educational infrastructure in the State with an outlay of Rs. 401.84 crores under the 'Education for All' Scheme. As a result of these initiatives, the drop out rate among elementary

school students has come down from 16% in 2001-2002 to 12% in 2002-2003.

34. The Government has introduced a major cash incentive scheme for honouring sportspersons from Tamil Nadu with impressive achievements at national and international level sporting events. So far 123 sportspersons have been given cash incentives amounting to Rs. 2.10 crores. The Tamil Nadu Sports Development Authority has introduced a battery of tests for broad-basing talent identification and encouraging sports culture in schools. Over 50 sportspersons have so far been enrolled under the Champions' Development Scheme for assistance in the form of sporting kits, quality nutrition, psychological development and financial assistance. In the coming financial year, a major step up will be made in the outlay for sports development with a focus on infrastructure development, talent identification and training. With a view to promoting excellence in the entire spectrum of physical education and sports, this Government proposes to establish a new University

dedicated to fostering physical education and sports in Tamil Nadu.

35. This Government's accomplishments in providing affordable and accessible health care facilities to the people are noteworthy. During 2001-2003, 746 health sub centres (HSCs) have been provided with new buildings at a total cost of Rs. 39.75 crores. 93 Primary Health Centres have also been upgraded to 30-bed hospitals at a total cost of Rs. 46.50 crores. This Government has increased the number of MBBS seats in five Medical Colleges by 315. Construction work in the first phase for providing necessary infrastructure to the five medical colleges has been taken up at a cost of Rs. 10.01 crores. Construction of 300-bed hospitals at New Government Medical Colleges in Vellore, Kanyakumari and Theni is making rapid progress. The approval of the Medical Council of India has been obtained for the medical college at Kanyakumari. Chennai has become the health capital of India. A new complex in the Government General hospital at Chennai being constructed at an outlay of Rs. 104.47 crores will be opened shortly.

36. The new “Industrial Policy” announced in September 2003, aimed at consolidating our strengths in the manufacturing sector and the roadmap of second generation reforms at the State level, has been widely welcomed. The Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) has reported that Tamil Nadu has received the highest quantum of new investments in the manufacturing sector totalling Rs. 46,795 crores at the end of October 2003. Hon’ble Members of this House will be pleased to know that Saint Gobain, the global giant in glass manufacturing, would be expanding its base in Tamil Nadu. Pursuant to the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the State Government and Tata Steel for setting up a titanium dioxide project in Tuticorin District, the company has already initiated preliminary prospecting work in the area. With the turn around in the economy and progress made in implementing the second-generation reforms outlined in the new Industrial Policy, substantial new investments can be expected as Tamil Nadu has verily become the destination of choice. A policy on public-private partnership in infrastructure development

incorporating cross country expertise in this field is currently under preparation.

37. Information Technology has become the key driver of the services sector in Tamil Nadu. With exports crossing \$ 1.4 billion (Rs. 7000 crores) and over 1000 IT-export companies, the IT sector in Tamil Nadu holds impressive promise in terms of new opportunities. This Government has outlined a visionary "IT Policy" that places the highest emphasis on Information Technology Enabled Services and Business-Process Outsourcing (BPO) activities. TIDCO has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with M/s. Ascendas of Singapore to establish the second IT Park with 1.5 million sq.ft. of world class built up space. The concept of the Knowledge Industry Township (KIT) has been finalized and this will come up at Sholinganallur. Work will commence shortly on the 6-lane IT Expressway leading from Madhya Kailash to Mamallapuram. These initiatives will help form the IT Bay area in Chennai to rival that in California. Tamil Nadu has attained the distinction of having been rated as the 'Leader' in the 'e-Readiness Report-2003'. The 7th National e-Governance

Conference was successfully conducted at Chennai. I am happy to inform you that the World Bank has decided to locate its permanent back office in India at Chennai. This shows that Chennai has indeed become the most attractive destination for the IT industry.

38. The Government places the highest emphasis on building world-class infrastructure. The focus will be on roads. The Tamil Nadu Road Sector Project with an outlay of Rs. 2116 crores assisted by the World Bank has been launched. A special programme to relay and upgrade 2149-Kms of State Highways, Major District Roads and Sugarcane Roads has been launched at a total cost of Rs. 221.32 crores.

39. The Nagapattinam Port has recently been expanded at a project cost of Rs. 100 crores to facilitate the arrival of 5 lakh tonnes of crude oil. The Tamil Nadu Maritime Board is working out plans for expansion and upgradation of the Cuddalore Port at an estimated cost of Rs. 250 crores. It is hoped that the Union

Government will accord early clearance for the implementation of the Sethu Samudram Project.

40. Members of this House may recall that the Tamil Nadu Electricity Board (TNEB) was saddled with a huge revenue gap of Rs. 5000 crores and was on the verge of fiscal collapse, when this Government took office in May 2001. Having arrested the rapid fiscal decline, the focus now is on augmenting generation capacities and enhancing distribution efficiencies in order to provide quality and uninterrupted power supply to the consumers. An additional 902 MW of generating capacity has been added during 2001-2003. New projects, namely, a 1000-MW plant at North Chennai, 1000-MW plant at Tuticorin and the 2000-MW plant in Kudangulam have been firmed up. Major load shedding in Tamil Nadu has become a thing of the past. The TNEB has earmarked Rs. 5914 crores from its total Tenth Plan outlay of Rs. 8000 crores to augment its distribution network. A roadmap for the future based on the Electricity Act, 2003, will be drawn up. The Government has taken action to provide solar

lighting in 154 remote habitations not connected to the supply grid in the current year.

41. Thanks to the professional tourism development policy of this Government, Tamil Nadu is fast becoming an enchanting destination for holidaying in Southern India. There has been a major step up in the outlay on tourism to create new infrastructure. Private sector participation is being encouraged in development of tourism. Chennai played host to the 64th SKAL World Congress in October 2003 for the first time in India. The selection of Chennai as a venue for the meeting has put the State on the international tourism map.

42. A Price Stabilization Fund to support small tea growers has been launched by the Government of India. Small tea growers can join this scheme by making a small initial contribution and will be eligible for price support when prices come down. Based on the request of small tea growers in Tamil Nadu, this Government has decided to make the initial contribution on behalf of 23,000 small tea growers to the Fund at an estimated cost of Rs.1.15 crores. Establishment of

a new electronic tea auction centre, namely, "Teaserve" and sale of 'Ooty' tea through the public distribution system are some of the important measures undertaken by this Government to help tea growers realize better prices.

43. The Government's decision to grant exclusive privilege of retail vending of Indian Made Foreign Spirit (IMFS) to TASMAL in Tamil Nadu has effectively broken the cartels that had hitherto monopolized liquor sales in State, thereby causing revenue loss to the Government. This decision has also helped 36,200 unemployed youth across the State to get jobs in the TASMAL-run retail outlets.

44. An ambitious infrastructure investment plan titled the 'Chennai Metropolitan Development Plan' with an investment of Rs. 18000 crores is being implemented over a period of ten years. In the current year, investments in infrastructure covering various sectors such as power, water supply, drainage, traffic and transportation, housing etc., totalling Rs. 1780.75 crores have been mobilized. These works are under rapid progress. The pristine beauty

of the world famous Marina Beach has been restored and people can now enjoy the sand and the sea without being troubled by anti-social elements and the din of all kinds of public meetings. Members of this August House will be happy to know that services under the Mass Rapid Transport System (MRTS) - Phase II have been extended up to Thiruvanmiyur recently. Nearly 67% of the total project outlay of Rs. 690 crores under the Phase-II programme of the MRTS is being borne by the State Government. The scheme for improving the waterways in Chennai with an outlay of Rs. 1700 crores is progressing well. I am glad that with all the programmes being taken up, Chennai is being restored to its position as the city premiere of the South.

45. The Government has taken effective steps to upgrade urban infrastructure in the State. Comprehensive sewerage schemes for 3 municipal corporations (Trichy, Madurai and Tirunelveli) and 4 municipalities (Mayiladuthurai, Kumbakonam, Thanjavur and Karur) are under implementation at a cost of Rs. 575.30 crores. The Government proposes to take up a massive project for providing

sewerage facilities at a total outlay of Rs. 844 crores so that all remaining district headquarters have a sewerage system.

46. The Chief Minister's policy on 'Malnutrition-Free Tamil Nadu' represents the Government's unswerving commitment to providing quality nutrition security for all. Drumstick tree leaves and curry leaf powder have been added to the food in the Noon Meal Centres to combat Vitamin A deficiency. The Government is in the process of establishing 4297 additional anganwadis in remote habitations to reach the unreached.

47. Women's empowerment has been carried to new heights in Tamil Nadu under the strong leadership of the Chief Minister. The Chief Minister's announcement of the Government's revolutionary policy that a child can carry the initial of the mother or the father or both parents has been a major boost to women's empowerment. The State has become a pioneer in the self-help group movement with coverage of about 25 lakh women in 1.52 lakh self help groups with savings estimated at Rs. 393.64 crores. Credit

linkage now exceeds Rs. 564 crores. Under the Entrepreneurship Development Programme, 2.5 lakh women have so far been trained in various avocations during 2001-2003 at a cost of Rs. 10 crores and this scheme would be continued in 2004. The revolutionary Cradle Baby Scheme has helped save the lives of 1221 girls and 1200 of them have also found foster homes where they are being brought up with love and care. The Revised Girl Child Protection Scheme introduced by this Government has enlisted 8188 beneficiaries at a total outlay of Rs. 12.48 crores during 2001-2003.

48. This Government is committed to ensuring economic and educational advancement of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes. Sanction has been accorded for the construction of 316 hostels for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe students at a total cost of Rs. 99.54 crores. This scheme will be continued in 2004-2005. The scheme of providing free bicycles to Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Caste convert girl students in the higher secondary classes has been a tremendous success. A total of 1.44 lakh cycles have been distributed among

eligible beneficiaries. The food allowance in hostels has been increased from Rs. 225 to Rs. 300 per month. A new scheme of providing cultivable land to landless Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe women beneficiaries is being launched.

49. The programmes launched to facilitate empowerment and welfare of the people belonging to the Backward Classes, Most Backward Classes, Denotified communities and the Minorities will be further strengthened. Construction of 214 hostels for students belonging to these communities has been taken up at a total cost of Rs. 68.49 crores. The food allowance given to students from these communities in hostels has also been enhanced from Rs. 225 to Rs. 300 per month. A scheme of special incentives for encouraging girl students belonging to these communities is being implemented with an outlay of Rs. 12 crores in the current year.

50. The Government has always given importance to improving the quality of life of the weavers. The scheme of providing free sarees and dhotis to old age pensioners and the free uniforms

scheme have been restructured to provide continuous employment to handloom weavers. A special project for upgrading skills and looms with an outlay of Rs. 25 crores has been launched in 13 districts. This scheme will come as a boon to nearly 25,000 handloom weavers in the State. The new scheme of providing free polycot sarees and dhotis has been widely welcomed. The quality of the sarees and dhotis has been greatly appreciated. This scheme now provides 1.11 crore sarees and 1.11 crore dhotis benefiting 2.22 crore people at a cost of Rs. 173 crores. This scheme also provides work to the powerloom weavers in the State. This scheme will be continued in the coming year and will form part of the social safety net. The Chief Minister has taken up with the Union Finance Minister the need to protect powerloom weavers in the State. The Chief Minister has suggested that either the optional Excise Duty system hitherto allowed to the powerloom sector be continued or full exemption from CENVAT should be given to the powerloom units with turnover less than Rs. 1 crore, just as in the case of small-scale industries. The Government of India has exempted the powerloom sector from payment of Excise Duty for

the first clearance up to Rs. 25 lakhs, if the annual sales turnover does not exceed Rs. 35 lakhs. As this is not adequate, this Government requests the Union Government to enhance the exemption limit from Rs. 25 lakhs to Rs. 1 crore to benefit small powerloom weavers.

51. The month-long retreat for 100 elephants at the Mudumalai Wild Life Sanctuary and Top Slip has been a tremendous success. This rejuvenation camp in a salubrious and cool environment was a welcome break for the pachyderms. This is an ample testimony to the Chief Minister's love and compassion for animals and indeed our entire eco-system.

52. Promotion of Tamil language, art and culture, and preservation of the State's rich cultural heritage have received the highest attention of this Government. Scientific Tamil has been introduced in all schools from LKG to standard XII from this academic year and text books on Scientific Tamil have been supplied free of cost to students at a cost of Rs. 5.42 crores. A Chair in Tamil Studies has been established at the Jawaharlal Nehru

University, New Delhi, with a contribution of Rs.50 lakhs by this Government. By coining the word 'Kudimagal' to also connote the word 'citizen', the Chief Minister has infused a new intensity to the concept of gender equality. The innovative "Annadhanam Scheme" has been extended to cover 162 temples across the State. The arrangements for the conduct of the Mahamakham Festival in March 2004 at Kumbakonam will be completed in right earnest at an estimated cost of Rs. 50 crores. During 2001-2003, Kumbabhisekam was conducted in 2780 temples in Tamil Nadu. It is proposed to renovate 6,000 small temples in Adi-Dravidar habitations with contributions from bigger temples at a cost of Rs. 15 crores. The Chennai Museum, which was completely renovated at a cost of Rs. 4.60 crores during its centenary celebrations, has become a major tourist attraction.

53. In a major effort to provide good governance, the Government has installed video-conferencing facility between the State Secretariat and district headquarters. The decision to form the Krishnagiri district by bifurcating the existing

Dharmapuri district has been widely welcomed. The new District will be inaugurated on 9th February, 2004. Improvements to the quality of service delivery in ten departments and agencies having extensive public interaction are being taken up for implementation in 2004 by adopting e-governance practices. The Government has been holding detailed discussions on the features of a new legislation on the Right to Information and this will be introduced in the Legislative Assembly shortly.

54. We can look back with pride on the splendid record of this Government on all fronts and be confident that under the strong and dynamic leadership of the Hon'ble Chief Minister, Tamil Nadu will surpass its excellent performance in all spheres in 2004. I hope that the deliberations in the House will be substantive, balanced and constructive in order to facilitate the economic progress of the State bringing prosperity to the people of Tamil Nadu.

Vanakkam

Jai Hind