

Hon'ble Members of the Legislative Assembly,

Vanakkam. I take great pleasure in addressing at the commencement of the twelfth session of the Thirteenth Legislative Assembly in 2010. I convey my hearty greetings for the Tamil New Year and Pongal, the festival of Tamils.

2. Eversince Kalaignar Karunanidhi was made the Chief Minister for the fifth time by the people of Tamil Nadu, in addition to having fulfilled all the promises, he has also formulated several new welfare schemes and has been working tirelessly to usher in well being and prosperity in the lives of the people of this state. It is well known that the people of Tamil Nadu have recognised and rewarded the achievements of the Government headed by him by way of great victories in the recent Parliament elections and in all the bye-elections. Conscious of these victories as people's testimonials and guided by the maxim 'Service to Man is Service to God', this Government will continue its march in the path shown by Perarignar Anna.

3. This Government has been successful in emphasizing and pursuing in all its actions the goal of social justice, one of the central tenets of the Dravidian Movement. At the same time, while reminding that true federalism based on state autonomy is yet to be realized, this Government is determined in its commitment to achieve that goal. The present scheme of distribution of powers between the Centre and the States has been devised sixty years ago based on the needs of a newly independent nation. The need for re-examining the same in today's context, with democracy having taken firm roots and thriving with vigour and vibrancy, is growing day by day. Urging this very same issue, a resolution on state autonomy was moved in this House in 1974 by Hon'ble Chief Minister Kalaignar and passed. The Union Government must strengthen the hands of State Governments which are closer to the people and have been effectively implementing schemes needed by them.

4. Successive Union Finance Commissions have reduced the share in devolution of well-

performing states like Tamil Nadu. We urge that this discriminatory stance should not be allowed to be continued by the Thirteenth Finance Commission also and such states must be given their fair share of devolution.

5. While supporting the Union Government for undertaking various economic reforms necessary for the accelerated development of the nation, it will be in the true spirit of federalism only if the State Governments are consulted by the Union Government before taking appropriate decisions on issues affecting the livelihood of the ordinary people who live in the lowest strata of the society like farmers, labourers and fishermen, decisions having nationwide implications and new draft legislations.

6. This Government is of the firm view that the proposed Goods and Services Tax, meant to replace the existing system of indirect taxes levied by the Union and the States, should be introduced based on consensus among the States without affecting the existing powers and revenues of the States.

7. This Government is determined to wipe out all forms of extremism. This Government is maintaining strict vigil to ensure that extremism does not infiltrate even to the smallest extent, into our state from neighbouring states or through coastal areas. This Government conveys its thanks to the Union Government for accepting its request and establishing a hub of the National Security Guards in Chennai. With a view to further motivating our police personnel who are involved in the noble act of providing protection to the public, this Government has accepted and implemented the recommendations of the Third Police Commission which was constituted by this Government in 2006 to promote their welfare. We are taking all steps necessary to further modernize our police force so that it will be equipped to meet the new challenges posed by the changing times.

8. It was this Government which waived co-operative agricultural loans and provided interest free co-operative crop loans for the first time in the country, with a view to giving an impetus to agriculture and motivating farmers. This year, the Government

has targeted to disburse co-operative crop loans to the tune of Rs.2,000 crores and so far, a sum of Rs.1,559 crores have been disbursed.

9. This Government had enhanced the procurement price of paddy from Rs. 600 per quintal in 2005-2006 to Rs.1050 per quintal and the procurement price of sugarcane from Rs.1,014 per tonne to Rs.1,550 per tonne which is inclusive of transportation charges and sugar recovery based incentive. **In order to further encourage the farmers to increase production of paddy this year, this Government has decided to grant an additional incentive of Rs.50 per quintal over and above the current procurement price of Rs.1,000 per quintal in respect of ordinary grade paddy and Rs.1,050 per quintal in respect of fine grade paddy. As a result, the procurement price for ordinary grade variety and fine grade variety will increase to Rs.1,050 and Rs.1,100 per quintal respectively. On account of this, the Government will incur an additional expenditure of Rs.80 crores.**

10. In addition to reopening the 'Uzhavar Sandhais' (Farmers' Shanties) which not only ensure fair price for agricultural produce like vegetables but are also very much beneficial to the consumers, 45 new 'Uzhavar Sandhais' have been opened in the last three and half years and they are functioning well. More number of 'Uzhavar Sandhais' will be opened this year.

11. The System of Rice Intensification (SRI) has led to significant increase in productivity and substantial reduction in the quantum of use of water. The President of the World Bank, Thiru. Robert Zoellick had recently commended the State for the successful implementation of this novel method. In addition, by extending precision farming to all districts, this Government has been motivating farmers to cultivate highly remunerative crops by utilizing less water. Further, under the World Bank funded Irrigated Agriculture Modernization and Water-Bodies Restoration and Management (IAMWARM) Project, implemented at an estimated cost of Rs.2,547 crores through the harmonized efforts of the various

departments relating to agriculture and allied activities, works are underway in 63 sub-basins benefiting 16 lakh acres of agricultural land.

12. Under the scheme of giving land free of cost to the poor and landless families, 1,77,057 poor agricultural families have been provided with 2,11,356 acres of land, free of cost so far. 4,65,386 poor farmers and agricultural labourers have been given benefits to the tune of Rs.371 crores through the Tamil Nadu Farmers and Agricultural Labourers Welfare Board so far.

13. This Government has placed special emphasis on implementing the National Agricultural Insurance Scheme meant to compensate farmers affected by natural calamities. Consequently when compared to the fact that during 2001-2006, 2,38,036 farmers had received compensation amounting to Rs.145 crores, in the last three and half years, 8,59,704 farmers have been given compensation amounting to Rs.680 crores. Out of the compensation amount of Rs.652 crores to be given to farmers on account of loss caused by the cyclone 'Nisha', even

after the State Government has fully disbursed its share of Rs.306 crores, in view of the release of only Rs.46 crores by the Government of India under its share, we urge the Union Government to release its remaining share of Rs.260 crores immediately.

14. The Nilgiris district was severely affected on account of the heavy rains during last November. Due to the landslides lives were lost and houses damaged. The important roads of the district were also damaged. Immediate relief works were taken up on a war footing. The fact that temporary houses were constructed in the place of fully damaged houses within 15 days and that restoration activities are underway with an allocation of Rs.25 crores, has been welcomed with satisfaction by the people of that district.

15. Though the State Government has been taking all efforts to resolve inter-state river water disputes through talks and legal means, we witness a situation where some neighbouring states are not even coming forward to give our legitimate share in the river waters, thus affecting the livelihood of our

farmers. In the Mullai Periyar issue, this Government will continue to take determined action to pursue all necessary legal action to protect the interests of the farmers of the southern districts and fully establish the rights of our state. We will continue to urge the Union Government to enable increasing the maximum level of storage of the existing dam across the Mullai Periyar river in accordance with the judgement of the Supreme Court and to prevent the efforts by the Kerala Government to the construct an unnecessary new dam.

16. The scheme for inter-linking of rivers is considered highly beneficial to water-deficit states and the Government of Tamil Nadu has been urging its execution. Though the Union Government may now be considering this scheme as infeasible, as far as this Government is concerned, taking a decision that at least intra-state rivers in the State should be linked expeditiously for taking the surplus flood water to dry districts, the same was announced in the Governor's Address of 2008. In pursuance of this announcement, the first phase of the 'Cauvery- Gundar Interlinking

Scheme' at a cost of Rs.189 crores and the 'Tamirabarani – Karumeniyar – Nambiar Interlinking Project' for taking the surplus water from Tamirabarani river to the water deficit areas of Tirunelveli and Thoothukudi districts at a cost of Rs.369 crores, are under implementation. We urge the Union Government to provide assistance for these schemes under Accelerated Irrigation Benefits Programme (AIBP) as was resolved by the National Development Council based on the suggestion made by the Hon'ble Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu in the National Development Council meeting held on 19.12.2007 that such schemes should be funded under Accelerated Irrigation Benefits Programme.

17. The Sethusamudram project has been the longstanding dream of Tamils and many scholars and experts had considered its implementation highly desirable. The people of Tamil Nadu are concerned about the delay in execution of this project for which the foundation stone was laid in the presence of the Hon'ble Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh, the Chairperson of UPA, Tmt. Sonia Gandhi and the

Hon'ble Chief Minister Kalaignar and leaders of all parties being present on the same dais. This Government urges the Union Government to remove the hurdles in the implementation of this project which has the potential to herald an era of economic strength and prosperity for the State and to implement this project expeditiously.

18. Though the overall inflation rate of our country at the end of the last week of November was only 4.78 percent, for the first time in the last 11 years, food inflation rate had increased to 19.05 percent on account of rise in prices of food items. The decline in production of commodities like sugar, pulses and edible oil on account of the drought which affected many parts of the country this year and the consequent rise in their prices is mainly responsible for this situation. This Government has been taking several steps to protect the common man and the middle income families from the burden of this price rise. In particular, it is this Government which has been providing rice at only one rupee a kilogram, the lowest price in the entire country. Furthermore, not

only this Government has been procuring and distributing essential food items like toor dal, urad dal, palm oil and wheat flour at subsidized prices through fair price shops, but also has been providing ten grocery items to all family card holders at a price of only Rs.50 under the 'scheme for distributing grocery items at subsidised prices'. These exemplary measures undertaken by the Government to shield the people from the rise in prices of essential commodities have provided great relief to the poor and the middle income families.

19. As a result of the various steps taken by this Government to ensure the availability of food and grocery items at subsidised prices in the State, the expenditure on account of food subsidy has increased from Rs.1,200 crores in 2005-2006 to Rs.4,000 crores in 2009-2010.

20. This Government has implemented several schemes in the last three and half years for improving infrastructure in government hospitals and filling the vacancies of doctors and nurses, thus ensuring quality health care in government hospitals

catering to the needs of the poor and ordinary people visiting these institutions every day. After this Government assumed office, medical infrastructure has been improved at a cost of Rs.792 crores and 6,009 doctors, 7,042 nurses and 2,812 hospital workers have been newly appointed in government hospitals.

21. Five new government medical college hospitals have been sanctioned to ensure the availability of higher level medical care in all parts of the State. **In addition, a new complex with modern buildings and infrastructure will be constructed for the Madras Medical College, the first medical college of the State and an institution of great heritage. I am happy to announce that this new complex will be constructed at a cost of Rs.70 crores adjacent to the Government General Hospital on the land previously occupied by the Central Jail.**

22. Under the 'Varumun Kaappom' Scheme, so far, 13,045 camps have been conducted across the State and 1,26,73,884 persons have benefited. The

free emergency '108' ambulance service is functioning successfully all over the State. As a result of these pioneering initiatives by the Government to promote the welfare of the people, the number of patients receiving treatment and number of deliveries in government hospitals have increased significantly.

23. Though government hospitals are functioning effectively and benefiting the general public, there existed a situation where the poor had to approach private hospitals for specialized treatment of several life threatening diseases. Recognizing this situation and conscious of the fact that the poor would not be able to afford the expenses for private medical care, the Hon'ble Chief Minister has announced and implemented a noble scheme, named 'Kalaingar Insurance Scheme for Life Saving Treatments'. The insurance premium for this scheme has been fully borne by the Government. Under this very popular scheme, 1,40,70,367 families have enrolled as members so far. Under this scheme, in the very first four months till now, 24,495 beneficiaries have

received free specialized treatment worth Rs.83 crores in 539 hospitals across the State.

24. The system of Activity Based Learning, successfully implemented in the schools of Tamil Nadu, has emerged as a model for the entire country. Experts from other states and several other countries have come to study its implementation in our state so as to replicate the same in their states and countries. Having successfully achieved universal primary education, this Government will strive towards universal secondary education by improving the quality of high schools under the national scheme for the development of secondary education.

25. In addition to providing education for all, it needs to be ensured that the education given is uniform and of high quality. With this objective, the Government has proposed to introduce the scheme for providing equitable education. The various existing syllabi in our state as well as other states were studied and their positive aspects identified and consolidated. Accordingly the Government decided to formulate a new, easy and common syllabus of high quality by

incorporating the good features so identified and implement the same throughout the State. This Government is of the firm view that the introduction of equitable education system will remove the existing difficulties, if any, faced by students and parents on account of multiple boards of education and syllabi and it will also enhance the competitiveness of our students in various national level examinations. I request all sections of the society to extend their co-operation for the success of this revolutionary scheme.

26. This Government would like to thank the Union Government for acceding to its request and thus approving the establishment of an Indian Institute of Management at Trichy and a World Class University at Coimbatore and for starting a Central University at Tiruvarur.

27. With a view to encouraging students who do not have any graduate in their families so far and pursue professional education after securing admission under the single window system, the Government has decided to bear the

entire tuition fee payable by these students in government and private engineering, medical, dental, agricultural, veterinary and law colleges, irrespective of their caste or income.

28. Under the scheme of providing free colour television sets to the poor families enabling them to have access to television, a medium of entertainment as well as a means to know contemporary world affairs and acquire scientific knowledge, in the first four phases, 1,12,80,000 colour television sets have been procured and so far, 96,09,220 families have received free colour television sets. **Further, under the fifth phase of this scheme, another 40 lakh colour television sets have been ordered and will be distributed during this year also.**

29. With a view to ensuring steady industrial development as well as meeting the constantly rising requirement for electricity by the growing population, this government is implementing various projects for installing additional power generation capacity in our state. Works are progressing expeditiously for

establishing 8,315 MW capacity power stations over a period of next four years by means of projects of the Central Government and Tamil Nadu Electricity Board (TNEB) as well as projects implemented through joint ventures and private sector. Out of these, Koodankulam Nuclear Power Plant is expected to commence power generation during this year and the power plant being established in Vallur in Tiruvallur district, a joint venture between National Thermal Power Corporation and TNEB, and TNEB's own project of North Chennai Thermal Power Station expansion, will commence power generation in the coming year.

30. During the last three and half years and especially even during recent economic downturn, several industrialists have constantly come forward to make investments in Tamil Nadu thanks to easy accessibility and transparent functioning of this Government. After this Government assumed charge, 37 new industries with an investment of Rs.46,091 crores have been attracted through a package of incentives thus ensuring employment opportunities for

2,22,569 persons. Recently, the French tyre manufacturing company “Michelin” has come forward to establish its world class manufacturing facility with an investment of Rs.4,000 crores at Gummidipoondi near Chennai. This reaffirms the leading position of Tamil Nadu in Automobile Industry. Moreover, the Financial City, coming up near Chennai, will play a major role in the future development of Tamil Nadu. Apart from this, with a view to ensuring that the benefits of industrial development reach the people in all parts of the State, this Government has encouraged entrepreneurs to establish their industries in various parts of the State like Gangaikondan, Perambalur, Palladam and Cheyyar.

31. This Government realizes that the only solution for the present socio-economic problems of southern districts lies in their industrial development. With deep concern for the industrial development of the southern districts, this Government is implementing a scheme of offering a package with additional incentives to encourage investors who come forward to establish industries in the southern

districts of the State. As a result of this, Videocon has come forward to establish a plant for manufacturing colour television sets and other electronic consumer durables, at Manamadurai in Sivaganga district with an investment of Rs.1,600 crores. Furthermore, Tamil Nadu Minerals Limited has commenced the work for establishing a granite cutting and polishing unit in Melur Taluk of Madurai District. As a result of the efforts of the Hon'ble Union Minister of Chemicals and Fertilizers, a company based in Indonesia and Hong Kong has come forward to establish industries in Madurai and Sivaganga districts for manufacturing tractors, steel alloys and forgings with an investment of Rs.2,200 crores. Last month, ATC Tyres has commenced production at Gangaikondan in Tirunelveli district.

32. Considering the fact that large scale development is taking place in urban areas of our state and that the urban population is growing at a very rapid pace, this Government is according high priority towards infrastructure development and poverty alleviation in these areas. Under the Union

Government's landmark scheme of Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission, 309 projects worth Rs.9,271 crores are under progress in 283 towns. Also, for the first time in the State, revolving fund assistance is being given to urban self help groups.

33. Works for the Chennai Metro-rail project, implemented in the public sector at an estimated cost of Rs.14,600 crores, have commenced. Similarly, the works for the Chennai Outer Ring Road, taken up at an estimated cost of Rs.1,081 crores will commence soon. With a view to carrying out clean-up and restoration works in the rivers like Cooum in Chennai and its suburban areas, this Government has decided to establish a Chennai Riverways Trust under the chairmanship of Hon'ble Deputy Chief Minister. This Trust will formulate and implement projects required for cleaning up and beautifying rivers in urban areas as has been done abroad.

34. A number of major projects have been executed over the last three and half years for solving the drinking water problem in different parts of the State. I commend this Government for completing and

putting into use the Ramanathapuram Combined Water Supply Scheme at an estimated cost of Rs.616 crores ahead of schedule. Tenders for the Hogenakkal Combined Water Supply Scheme, which is the only solution for the drinking water problems of Dharmapuri and Krishnagiri districts having a high fluoride content in ground water, being implemented at an estimated cost of Rs.1,929 crores are being finalized. The works under this scheme will commence in the coming March.

35. The Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, a flagship scheme of the UPA Government, is being implemented very well in all the districts of our state. Under this scheme a sum of Rs.2,885 crores has been disbursed as wages in our state so far. Under this scheme, 82 per cent of the beneficiaries are women and 59 per cent are Adi Dravidars. Accepting our request, the Union Government has agreed to increase the daily wage given under this scheme from Rs.80 to Rs.100. The enhanced daily wage has come into effect from 1.1.2010.

36. Under Anaithu Grama Anna Marumalarchi Thittam (AGAMT) being implemented by this Government, works to the tune of Rs.2,041 crores have been taken up in 10,104 village panchayats so far. Works in the remaining 2,514 village panchayats will be taken up under this scheme in the coming financial year. During the last three and a half years, works for rural roads, schools etc., have been taken up, availing financial assistance of Rs.3,536 crores from NABARD. By speedy execution of all these projects, this Government will ensure provision of all basic infrastructure requirements of the people living in the rural areas of Tamil Nadu.

37. This Government has always extended a firm hand of support to the local bodies so as to enable them to provide proper facilities to the people and play their appropriate role in the development of the State. With the object of relieving the urban local bodies of their debt burden, this Government has waived their loan to the tune of Rs.787 crores. This Government has progressively increased the quantum of State's own tax revenues devolved to local bodies

from 8 % in 2005-2006 to 9.5% at present. This will be enhanced further to 10% in the coming financial year. This Government has constituted the Fourth State Finance Commission to make recommendations regarding devolution of funds to local bodies and to explore the possibilities of revenue augmentation by them during the period 2012-2017.

38. Having regard to the fact that house site pattas are essential for providing housing facility to the poor, this Government had issued orders reducing the minimum number of years one must have resided on government lands to be eligible for a house site patta from ten years to five years as well as removing the income ceiling. On account of this special initiative, 6,99,917 house site pattas have been distributed to the poor under this scheme in the last three and half years. **I am happy to announce that this requirement of minimum number of years of residence will be reduced from five years to three years and as a result thousands of poor people will stand to benefit by getting house site pattas.**

39. **In order to provide housing to those engaged in the film industry, inclusive of thousands of workers in this industry and those engaged in the television industry, accepting the requests made by their associations, the Government has allotted 90 acres of land near Chennai. The Government has permitted them to construct multi-storeyed apartments on this land.**

40. It was only Hon'ble Chief Minister Kalaignar who had established the Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board in 1970 to construct tenements in the place of urban slums and implemented the scheme for constructing free houses for the Adi Dravidars in rural areas for the first time in the country in 1974. It was also only Kalaignar who had established Periyar Memorial Samathuvapurams as embodiment of the Kural 'All human beings are born equal'. Even in today's positive environment when our country and state are consistently growing with concomitant improvement in the quality of the life of the people, we witness with pain a situation where the demand for housing, one of the most basic needs, is

not yet fully met. While this Government has ensured the social security and food security of the common man through various special schemes and has also made creditable achievements in creating new infrastructure in the last three and half years, a miserable situation still exists where, across the State poor people are living in mud-walled houses with thatched roofs, being subjected to natural calamities. Based on the last census and other assessments, the number of such houses in the rural areas of our state is estimated to be around 21 lakhs. If all these huts are to be converted into permanent houses in our state, only under the present centrally assisted scheme of Indira Awas Yojana executed all over the country, then it would take another 30 years. **Considering this aspect, in the first phase, with a view to bringing light in the lives of the poor living in these 21 lakh huts, this Government has now designed a fully State Government funded, mega project to convert all these huts into concrete roofed permanent houses which will be given free of cost to the beneficiaries. I take immense pleasure in announcing that, under this scheme,**

commencing from 2010-2011, 21 lakh mud-walled houses with thatched roof will be converted into permanent houses in six years. In the coming financial year, being the first year of this scheme, three lakh permanent houses will be constructed at an estimated cost of Rs.1,800 crores. This noble scheme which would pave for hutless villages will be called 'Kalaignar Housing Scheme'.

41. After this Government assumed charge, unorganised labour welfare boards which were earlier abolished, have been revived and various welfare benefits are being given through them. So far, welfare assistance worth Rs.184 crores have been disbursed to 7,38,690 beneficiaries through unorganized labour welfare boards.

42. Under the scheme for providing monthly assistance to unemployed youth, this Government has enhanced the annual income limit of the family of the unemployed from Rs.24,000 to Rs.50,000. Under this scheme, 3,53,801 youth have been given assistance of Rs.240 crores so far.

43. Educated rural youth do not have access to information on employment opportunities as well as means to equip themselves with the skill sets required for getting employment. With a view to changing this situation, various employment camps are being organized in many districts of the State by voluntary organizations with the participation of private sector, to create awareness among rural youth regarding various employment opportunities in private sector, especially in the information technology sector as well as to prepare them for getting these jobs. Thousands of youth are benefited by participating in these camps. ELCOT is also organizing massive camps in association with private sector industry organisations. This Government commend these voluntary organizations for their useful initiatives and extend its support as well as cooperation.

44. This Government has accorded the highest priority to the welfare of the people belonging to Adi Dravidar and Tribal communities. As never before, 15 percent of the State's total Annual Plan of Rs.17,500 crores, that is, Rs.2,615 crores have been

allocated for the Scheduled Castes Sub-Plan for Adi Dravidars. This Government has paved the way for socio-economic upliftment of Arundhatiars who are the most disadvantaged among Adi Dravidars by providing three percent reservation to them within the quota for Adi Dravidars. I am glad to inform you that as a result of this step taken by the Government, 56 students and 1,165 students belonging to Arundhatiar community have got admissions in medical and engineering colleges respectively.

45. The Tamil Nadu Adi Dravidar Housing and Development Corporation (TAHDSCO) had given loans to Adi Dravidar entrepreneurs to pursue non-form sector enterprises. They have now represented in the Government to waive these loans as they are not in a position to repay the same. I am happy to announce that the Government has accepted their request and decided to waive the loans given by TAHDSCO for non-farm sector activities amounting to Rs.83 crores being the overdue principal and interest as

on 31.3.2009. 53,524 Adi Dravidar entrepreneurs will benefit from this wavier.

46. This Government has removed the difficulties in obtaining community certificates faced by members of certain communities who are declared as Most Backward and De-notified communities only in certain parts of the State, when they shift their residence to other parts of the State and ordered that they will be able to receive community certificates from any part of the State where they are residing. While necessary Constitutional Amendment has been effected to facilitate the provision of 27% reservation for students belonging to Other Backward Classes in institutions of higher learning under the Union Government, we urge the Union Government to also ensure that the benefits of reservation enjoyed by the Hindu and Buddhist members of Adi Dravidar communities are also extended to Christian Adi Dravidars.

47. This Government had established 145 Samathuvapurams during 1996-2001. In accordance with the announcement of Hon'ble Chief

Minister that another 95 Samathuvapurams will be established in three years, 29 new Samathuvapurams have been opened. The works for establishing another 30 Samathuvapurams are underway in this financial year. The remaining 36 Samathuvapurams will be established in the coming financial year.

48. This Government has always been committed to giving women their due recognition and position in the society and has firmly supported them in playing their rightful role in the development of the society. It was this Government, during its earlier regime, provided equal property rights and gave 33% reservation for women in employment as well as local bodies. In this context, this Government welcomes the decision of the Union Government to enhance the reservation for women in local bodies from 33% to 50%. The recommendation of a Parliamentary Committee that the law for providing 33% reservation for women in Parliament and State Legislatures should be enacted immediately is a matter of great happiness, as a ray of light in the dark sky. We urge that this Bill may be enacted without any further delay.

49. The Self Help Group Movement, launched by the DMK Government twenty years back, has taken roots and grown today into a massive social movement. With a view to further strengthening this movement, 1,07,024 women self help groups consisting of 16.59 lakh members have been newly formed in the last three and half years. Further, in addition to having ensured that all eligible self help groups receive revolving fund through an allocation of Rs.150 crores, these groups have also been provided with bank credit linkage to the tune of Rs.5,022 crores.

50. In the recently concluded session of the Parliament, the proposed introduction of the Marine Fisheries (Regulation and Management) Bill, which would have affected the livelihood of fishermen, was deferred on the request of the Hon'ble Chief Minister. Moreover, the Hon'ble Union Minister for Agriculture has assured that since the draft Bill has significant bearing on the interests of the fishermen, the Government of India will not move any further without fully safeguarding the welfare of fishermen. This Government strongly urges that the Union

Government should not enact any law which is against the interests of fishermen. We also urge the Union Government to take immediate steps to stop the frequent harassment of fishermen from our state by the Sri Lankan Navy. Further, we would continue to exhort the Union Government that the traditional rights enjoyed by the fishermen of the State in Katchatheevu till 1976 be restored.

51. After this Government assumed office, a number of welfare measures have been provided to tsunami-affected fishermen. Nets, by-cycles, torch lights, life-jackets and first-aid equipments were given to fishermen at a cost of Rs.110 crores. In addition, the monthly provision of subsidised diesel was increased from 1,000 litres to 1,500 litres. Fishermen who lost their mechanized boats due to tsunami and took loans from banks to buy new mechanized boats have represented that they are unable to repay these loans and hence require the assistance of State Government in settling their dues. Accepting their request, this Government has formulated a scheme in consultation with the banks to remove the debt burden

of fishermen who own mechanized boats. **Under this scheme, the entire principal of the loans taken by tsunami affected fishermen will be repaid by the State Government. The Banks have agreed to waive the outstanding interest on these loans. As a result, the State Government will incur an additional expenditure of Rs.80 crores.**

52. In order to provide relief to Sri Lankan Tamils who had become refugees in their own land undergoing indescribable miseries, this Government has collected contributions amounting to Rs.52 crores and sent essential relief materials to them. In this context, we convey our heartfelt gratitude to the Union Government for announcing a relief package of Rs.1,000 crores for the rehabilitation of Sri Lankan Tamils on return to their places of residence.

53. Over a lakh of Sri Lankan Tamils, displaced by civil war and accommodated in camps, could return to their original places of residence thanks to the tireless efforts of the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu. It is a matter of some solace that the Sri Lankan Government has assured that the

remaining people in the camps would also be allowed to return to their original places of residence by the end of this month and provided with necessary rehabilitation. At the same time, we urge the Union Government to continue to impress upon the Sri Lankan Government that they must be extended full rights and protection, their livelihoods lost during the war be restored and a permanent political solution to the satisfaction of Sri Lankan Tamils be found at the earliest.

54. As directed by the Hon'ble Chief Minister, Hon'ble Ministers have inspected all Sri Lankan Tamil refugee camps in the State. After ascertaining their needs, they submitted detailed reports to the Government. Accordingly, a package of Rs.100 crores has been announced for providing facilities like drinking water, roads and housing and works in this regard have already commenced. In addition, free colour television sets have been provided to them and the Kalaignar Insurance Scheme for Life Saving Treatments has been extended to all families in these camps. Considering

the fact that they have been living in our country for many years without causing any problem, this Government urges the Union Government to grant them permanent residentship.

55. Besides honouring Tamil by conferring the status of classical language, the Union Government has also established a Central Institute of Classical Tamil at Chennai. The Hon'ble Chief Minister has announced that the World Classical Tamil Conference will be held in a befitting manner in Coimbatore from the coming June 23rd to June 27th. For this purpose an apex committee headed by the Chief Minister and 20 other committees have been constituted.

56. Twenty halls will be set up in the CODISSIA complex in Coimbatore to enable Tamil scholars and lovers of the language who will gather in large numbers from all over the world, to exchange their views on the Tamil language, its development and needs. A Conference Pandal with capacity to seat thousands of people will be erected near this complex. As a commemoration of this conference, a world class

botanical garden by the name 'Garden of Classical Tamil' will be established in Coimbatore.

57. Recognising the fact that the humanity is a mere thread in the fabric of nature and this thread cannot exist independently, nations of the world have in-principle resolved in the recently concluded United Nations Climate Change Conference held in Copenhagen that necessary steps need to be taken to protect the environment and prevent global warming. Our Hon'ble Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh had stated that necessary schemes in this regard will be implemented by our country also. Our Government, which has been implementing many far sighted and progressive schemes, will contribute its mite in furtherance of this objective. Accordingly, this Government will implement schemes for protection of the environment and promotion of clean energy. **For this purpose, an 'Environment Protection and Renewable Energy Development Fund' will be established by this Government.**

58. In spite of the difficult financial situation due to the economic slowdown, this Government has

implemented the recommendations of the Sixth Pay Commission for its employees and teachers. Accepting their long standing request, noon meal workers and anganwadi workers have been given special time scale of pay and special pension. While this Government has been accepting all the fair requests of government employees, this Government would urge that all employees should extend their full co-operation and involvement in the great task of taking the Government's welfare schemes to the people.

59. As per procedure, regular appointment to the vacancies in the Government service should be made only through the Public Service Commission. During the interregnum caused by unavoidable delay in getting the selection list from Public Service Commission for filling up certain vacancies, with a view to avoiding delay in provision of essential services to the public, the Government may resort to appointment of retired government employees to a few of these vacancies purely as a temporary measure. This Government would like to clarify that

this temporary measure should neither be construed as affecting the opportunities of the youth waiting for employment nor as an extremely harsh measure of banning recruitment altogether.

60. The works relating to the new Legislative Assembly cum Secretariat Complex in the Omandurar Government Estate are progressing at a fast pace. This large and beautiful complex, equipped with modern amenities, will not only be of great utility to Hon'ble Members of Legislative Assembly and government employees, but will also be a matter of pride to our state. In addition, the works for the Arignar Anna Centenary library, a world class library being established at Chennai, are nearing completion.

61. In view of the consensus amongst all Tamil scholars and great men that the first day of the month of Thai, being the first day of the Thiruvalluvar Year, is also the Tamil New Year day, necessary legislation to this effect was enacted and this day is now being celebrated as Tamil New Year day. In addition to conveying my greetings for the forthcoming Tamil New Year and Pongal, I also

request everyone in the State to celebrate this day as a day of great joy and festivity in our lives.

62. I conclude this address with the hope that you will always be a source of strength and support for this Government which is endeavouring in all possible ways to promote the welfare of the people bringing cheer to workers, farmers and to all sections of the society.

Vanakkam

Jai Hind