

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE TO THE
MEMBERS OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh: 29-11-2013

I am delighted to be here today to address this august House.

Nested in the foothills of the Himalayas, the State of Arunachal Pradesh has always occupied a unique space in the Indian imagination. The natural beauty of the state along with it being home to a diversity of cultures, religions and peoples has rendered it a special character within the Indian Union.

Arunachal is the largest state area-wise in the north-east region with ever green forests covering 82% of the State. The state is inhabited by 26 major tribes and 110 sub-tribes, who speak different dialects. At the same time the state has the lowest density in the country of 17 persons per sq. km.

Arunachal Pradesh abounds in places of historical and cultural importance. It finds mention in the Puranas and the Mahabharata. It is believed that here Sage Parashuram washed away his sins, Sage Vyasa meditated, King Bhishmaka founded his kingdom and Lord Krishna married his consort Rukmini. Arunachal is also home to the 400 year old Tawang Monastery and the birth place of the sixth Dalai Lama, Tsangyang Gyatso. Arunachal Pradesh is a nature's treasure trove and home to more than 500 varieties of orchids, 500 indigenous species of medicinal plants, 115 species of Rhodendrons and 60 species of indigenous Bamboo. The richness of flora and fauna that occur in this state presents a panorama of biological diversity.

I am pleased to know, this Assembly has over the years taken many legislature initiatives in the fields of Land Reforms, Education, Social Welfare, Health, Protection of Forest and Environment, Panchayat Raj, Municipal Corporation etc. The emphasis laid by successive Governments on faster and inclusive development under the guidance of this Legislature over the last 38 years has resulted in significant improvement in the quality of life. The State which started from almost zero literacy rate at the time of independence is soon going to touch the national average. The Prime Minister's Package announced on January 31, 2008 is under speedy implementation. It is a matter of joy that within couple of months the people of this State will get their first ever train in the State capital. I congratulate and compliment all of you on the many achievements of Arunachal Pradesh in recent times.

Arunachal Pradesh has always recorded a relatively high percentage of voter turnout in every election. This shows the interest and political consciousness of the people of the State. This is very encouraging and further promotes the growth of representative democracy. Traditions of consultative decision-making have been prevalent in our country since the ancient times. It is said that during the Vedic age, Assemblies of people conducted the business of administration by deliberating on policies, formulating legislation and dispensing justice. The popular assembly was a regular institution in the early years of the Buddhist age. They used to consider petitions of people and also act as the Supreme Court of appeal. Archaeological inscriptions of the Tenth and Eleventh centuries of the current era indicate that the institution of the Sabha or assembly in our country had achieved a high degree of efficiency.

In a similar manner, the people of this land have also ruled themselves through customary and traditional laws of respective tribes. Institutions like Buliang, Kebang, Mouchuk etc. were democratic institutions which derived their authority from the expression of the will and power of the people. These systems are still prevalent and function side by side with the modern system of representative democracy. I was delighted to learn that leaders of the traditional councils like Kebang, Buliang etc. recite at the beginning of their meeting – (quote) “Villagers and brethren, let us strengthen our custom and our council, let us improve our relations, let us make the laws straight and equal for all, let our laws be uniform, let our customs be the same for all, let us be guided by the reason and see that justice is done and the compromise reached that is acceptable to both parties. Let us decide while the dispute is fresh, lest the small disputes grow big and continue for the long time. We have come together for a council meeting and let us speak in one voice and decide our verdict. So let us decide and mete out justice.” (Unquote). Modern day legislators would do well to heed this sage advice of the tribal elders.

India today is recognized as a role model of a successful modern Constitutional parliamentary democracy. The fact that we are operating in a highly pluralistic and diverse society beset with myriad challenges is also well known. When we opted for parliamentary democracy as the governing model for free India, the world viewed us with scepticism, and even suspicion. But, we have proved the prophets of doom wrong and maintained our unity, established a highly successful democracy and registered rapid economic growth.

The Parliament and Legislatures are the cornerstone on which rests the edifice of our democratic polity. One of the basic objectives of a representative democracy is to see that governance is carried out keeping in mind the interests of the people and their needs and aspirations. In a parliamentary democracy, the legislature represents the sovereign will of the people.

Friends, being a representative of the people is a matter of privilege and a great honour. This privilege however carries with it great responsibility. Elected representatives have many roles to play and there are competing demands – from one's Party, from the Assembly and from the constituency. The job of a legislator is a 24/7 responsibility. They have to be sensitive and responsive to the problems of the people and give voice to their grievances by raising them on the floor of the Legislature. They must act as the link between the people and the Government.

The Legislative Assembly is a master of the Executive in the sense that the Chief Minister along with his Council of Ministers is accountable collectively and severally to the Legislative Assembly. The Executive can be unseated at any time by passing a resolution of 'No Confidence' in the State Legislative Assembly by a simple majority. Moreover, most of the instruments of governance are executed through appropriate laws passed by Legislatures. The Executive's dependence on Legislature is total and it is essential that legislatures are responsible and responsive to this huge task entrusted on it by the Constitution.

Elected representatives have exclusive control over money and finance. No expenditure can be incurred by the Executive without approval of Legislature, no tax can be levied except by a law passed by the Legislature and no money can be withdrawn from the Consolidated Fund of the State without the approval of the Legislature. With the heightened complexity of administration and legislation, Legislators must ensure adequate discussion and scrutiny before passing of legislation.

Our founding fathers dreamt of an India in which the three pillars of the State, namely, the legislature, the executive and the judiciary work in conjunction, exercising checks and balances on one another in a manner that ensures that its citizens can grow in an environment of freedom, justice and equality. This separation of power avoids absolute concentration of power in any one organ of State. In addition, the Constitution of India also provides for separation between the two levels of government – Centre and State with the legislative powers of each clearly defined in the Constitution. The last few decades have shown that the founding fathers had chosen wisely and well, and that our people, have proved detractors to be wrong, and have made a wonderful success of our democracy, which is the largest in the world.

Arunachal Pradesh is an integral and important part of the North East region of India and a core stakeholder in India's Look East foreign policy. India has long standing civilizational bonds with its neighbours in South and South East Asia as well as East Asia. The north east of India provides a natural bridge between us and South East Asia. The essential philosophy of our Look East Policy, is that India must find its destiny by linking itself more and more with its Asian partners and the rest of the world. We seek to make our neighbours partners in our development. We believe that India's future and our own best economic interests are served by closer integration with Asia.

There is little time to be lost. Considering the huge pool of natural resources and the quality of its human resources, the North East of India has the potential of being an important investment destination and a centre for trade and business. We must harness the opportunities that are emerging from the rise of Asia and India's growing economic integration of India with the region. No longer should this State be considered remote. The Centre and State Government should together rapidly build the infrastructure linkages and connectivity with the rest of India that is required and this Legislature and the people of Arunachal should extend every assistance possible to this venture. The State has a total hydropower potential of about 58,000 MW. I am happy to know that projects of almost 46,000 MW hydro-power potential have been allotted for development to central public sector undertakings and various independent power producers of which majority of allotment is for development of projects in joint sector with the state government. It is a challenge for the people and the State Government of Arunachal Pradesh as well as the Central Government to ensure that these Hydropower Projects are commissioned in time and the economy of Arunachal Pradesh gets a quantum jump to become one of the richest states in the country. Since Arunachal Pradesh has common borders with three countries, the development of border areas is also vital and must receive our utmost attention.

The biggest asset of India as an emerging global economic power is our talented, forward looking and resourceful youth population. The people of the Arunachal Pradesh are fast in learning, adaptable to change, open in their outlook and technology friendly. We need to collectively ensure that our youth are equipped with the best of skills and knowledge. They must be provided every opportunity possible to develop their innate talents and contribute to not just this state and country but entire humanity.

I am happy to note that the political leadership of the State is fully seized of the challenges and opportunities and is working sincerely to usher in a new era of peace and prosperity to its people. There is nothing which can stand in the way of Arunachal Pradesh provided there is will and determination on the part of its people and leaders.

I wish all of you gathered here and the people of the state all success in your efforts to attain speedy and sustainable economic development of the state. I call upon the Arunachal Pradesh Legislative Assembly to continue to maintain the highest standards of democratic practice and dedicate itself totally to the welfare of the people.

May Arunachal Pradesh emerge as a land of grace and beauty, a shining jewel amongst the diverse states that make our wonderful country.

Thank you,

JAI HIND