

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB
MUKHERJEE TO MEMBERS OF BOTH HOUSES OF
PARLIAMENT**

January 31, 2017

Central Hall, Parliament House

Honourable Members,

1. In this ***Basant*** season of renewal and resurgence, I welcome you all to this Joint Session of both Houses of Parliament. This is a historic session heralding the advancement of the Budget cycle and merger of the Railway Budget with the General Budget for the first time in independent India. We gather once again to celebrate democracy, a cherished value and culture that has prospered throughout the long history of our nation. Indeed, a culture that guides my government towards ***Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas***.

2. The ideal of ***saha na vavatu, saha nau bhunaktu*** - May we be protected together and blessed together with bliss - has inspired our civilisation from time immemorial. This year marks the 350th birth anniversary of the great ***Sikh Guru - Guru Gobind Singhji***. We are also observing the one thousandth birth anniversary of the great saint-philosopher ***Ramanujacharya***. The luminous path of social transformation and reform shown by them serves as a beacon for all, and is an inspiration to my government.

3. This year marks the Centenary year of **Champaran Satyagraha**, which gave a new direction to our freedom struggle and channelised **janashakti** in the fight against colonial power. Mahatma Gandhi's ideals of **Satyagraha** instilled in every Indian an indomitable self-belief, and spirit of sacrifice for the larger good. This **janashakti** is today our greatest strength.

4. The resilience and forbearance demonstrated by our countrymen, particularly the poor, recently in the fight against black money and corruption, is remarkable. The same spirit has driven the LPG "Give It Up Campaign." Over 1.2 crore consumers have voluntarily given up their LPG subsidy, which has helped the underprivileged in accessing LPG connections. This **janashakti** has transformed **Swachh Bharat Mission** into a **jan-andolan**. 1.4 lakh villages, over 450 cities, 77 districts and 3 states have declared themselves **Open Defecation Free**. My government salutes the strength of **janashakti** and pledges to constructively utilise it in **Rashtra Nirman**.

Honourable Members,

5. At the core of all my Government's policies is the welfare of the **garib, dalit, peedit, shoshit, vanchit, kisan, shramik** and **yuva**. My government is guided by the **Antyodaya** philosophy

of **Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya**. His centenary year is being observed as **Garib Kalyan Varsh**.

6. Financial inclusion is key to poverty alleviation. An unprecedented 26 crore plus **Jan Dhan** accounts have been opened for the unbanked. Over 20 crore RUPAY debit cards have been issued to enable cashless payments. Moving swiftly from “**Jan Dhan to Jan Suraksha**” close to 13 crore poor have been covered under various social security schemes.
7. To take the banking system to the doorstep of the poor and the unbanked, the Indian Postal Payment Bank has been started. The postal network with wider reach and deep penetration of over 1.5 lakh post offices will also function as postal banks. Besides the over 1 lakh **bank-mitras** appointed by banks, over 2.5 lakh **Gram-Dak-Sewaks** will also function as banking correspondents.
8. Over Rs 2 Lakh Crore has been provided through 5.6 crore loans sanctioned under **Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana** to ensure collateral-free bank financing for the unfunded, and to promote small businesses. Seventy percent of this has been availed of by women entrepreneurs.
9. Under the **Deen Dayal Antyodaya Yojana**, which aims to empower women, particularly from the deprived sections, over Rs. Sixteen Thousand crore have been made available to Self

Help Groups in the current Financial Year. The scheme aims to reach out to nearly 5 crore women soon.

Honourable Members,

10. My Government has taken many initiatives to improve the quality of life of the poor through assured housing, affordable healthcare, safe drinking water and sanitation, and access to clean energy.
11. My Government is committed to provide shelter to every houseless poor household through the **Pradhan Mantri Aawas Yojana** with appropriate interest subvention on housing credit.
12. Poor sanitation further weakens the economic wherewithal of a poor household. **Swachh Bharat Abhiyan** aims to ensure health and sanitation, particularly for the poor. Under this mission, more than 3 crore toilets have been constructed.
13. The **Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana** will make clean energy accessible to the poor. This scheme aims to safeguard the health of women and children by providing them with a clean cooking fuel – LPG, liberating them from the ill-effects of smoky kitchens, and long hours of collecting firewood. Free gas connections are being provided to 5 crore poor households. Already 1.5 crore connections have been provided in the

current financial year. It is noteworthy that 37 percent of the **Ujjwala** beneficiaries belong to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

14. Under **Deen Dayal Upadhyay Gram Jyoti Yojana**, out of the over 18,000 villages which have been in darkness since independence, over 11,000 have been electrified in a record time. Under UJALA (**Unnat Jyoti by Affordable LEDs for All**) programme, over 20 crore LED bulbs have been distributed, resulting in savings of more than Rs. Ten thousand crore in the electricity bills of consumers, majority of whom are poor.
15. Several steps have been taken to make healthcare affordable and accessible to every citizen of our country, particularly the poor. Mission **Indradhanush** commits to vaccinate “**every child everywhere**” against preventable diseases. It has so far benefited 55 lakh children. **Pradhan Mantri Bharatiya Jan Aushadi Pariyojana** has been launched to ensure that the poor have access to quality medicines at affordable prices. Special facilities created to control the endemic Japanese encephalitis have yielded encouraging results in significantly reducing mortality due to this disease.

Honourable Members,

16. In **Kisan's** welfare lies the nation's prosperity. A favourable monsoon after consecutive years of drought, supplemented by

farmer-oriented schemes has increased the acreage and yield of most **Kharif** crops. The sown area in the current **Rabi** season has shown six percent increase in comparison to last year.

17. My Government has taken various steps to transform the lives of our farmers. Focus has been on holistic development of agriculture sector - making available affordable credit, ensuring assured supply of seeds and fertilizers, improving irrigation facilities, comprehensive risk coverage, improving productivity through Soil Health Cards, assured market and remunerative prices for the produce through **e-NAM** (National Agriculture Market).
18. **Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana** expanded the ambit of risk-coverage, doubled the sum insured, and facilitated lowest-ever premium for the farmers. During **Kharif** 2016, around 3.66 crore farmers were insured for a sum of Rs. 1.4 lakh crore.
19. With the objective of digitisation of all the live **Kisan Credit Cards**, another three crore cards will be converted into **RUPAY** debit cards soon. The corpus of NABARD fund has been doubled to Rs. Forty One Thousand crore to ensure easy credit access to farmers.
20. With focus on **Per Drop More Crop** and “**Har Khet ko Pani**”, coverage under **Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana**

has been expanded. More than 12.7 lakh hectares have been brought under micro irrigation in the last two years.

21. Honourable Members may recall that soaring prices of pulses was a matter of grave concern around this time last year. My government has taken proactive steps and prices of pulses are now under control. To ensure fair price for farmers and to protect consumers, a buffer stock of 20 lakh tonnes of pulses has been envisaged against which 8 lakh tonnes of pulses have already been procured.

Honourable Members,

22. My government is making ***Nari Shakti*** an integral part of our development journey. Our women deserve equal opportunity. The Rio Olympics, where we took great pride in the performance of ***P.V. Sindhu, Sakshi Malik, Deepa Karmakar*** and others, illustrates the strength of our women. Women are being inducted in combat streams of our Armed Forces. The nation is proud of its first three women fighter pilots. This reminds us of what we can achieve, as a nation, if women are fully empowered, and if their skills and talent are optimally utilised.

23. ***The Beti Bachao Beti Padhao*** scheme that addresses the issue of declining Child Sex Ratio, is yielding encouraging results. Under the ***Sukanya Samridhi Yojana***, launched with

an objective of ensuring a secure future to our *girl child*, over one crore accounts have been opened and an amount of over Rs. eleven thousand crore has been deposited. The ***Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan*** will provide comprehensive ante-natal care by a qualified medical practitioner to all pregnant women. The revision of ***Maternity Benefit Act*** and enhancement of maternity leave from 12 weeks to 26 weeks will support pregnant women at the workplace.

Honourable Members,

24. 65 percent of our population today is below the age of 35. Our youth is our greatest strength and ***yuva urja*** needs to be effectively channelised. With the motto of “***Har Haath ko Hunar***”, my government has taken several steps for skilling the youth and improving their employability. The work of skill development, that was earlier spread across 21 ministries and 50 departments, has been brought under one umbrella Ministry. The ***Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana*** has been launched with a budget outlay of Rs. Twelve thousand crore, to train One crore youth over the next four years. Over 20 lakh youth have already benefited. ***National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme*** has been launched with a budget outlay of Rs. Ten thousand crore. 978 employment exchanges spread across the country have been integrated as part of the National Career Service Portal.

25. My Government has opened new avenues and made higher technical education more accessible to students from economically weaker sections. For the first time, ITI trainees have been provided with academic equivalence at matriculation and higher secondary level through bridge courses to enable them to pursue higher education. With the objective of providing training of international standards to youth, a nationwide network of 50 India International Skill Centres is being established. **The Pradhan Mantri YUVA Yojana** has been launched for promoting entrepreneurship education and training amongst 7 lakh students.

26. My government has announced a package of Rs. Six thousand crore to boost employment generation and exports in the apparel and made-ups sector. This package is expected to generate over 1.1 crore jobs, mostly for women.

Honourable Members,

27. **Shram-eva jayate** (श्रमेव जयते) is one of the foremost guiding principles of my government and several measures have been taken for the welfare of the **shramik**. For the first time ever, minimum wages have been increased by 42 percent in both agricultural and non-agricultural sectors. For bonus coverage, the calculation ceiling limit has been doubled to Rs. Seven thousand, and the eligibility limit increased from Rs. Ten

thousand to Rs. Twenty One thousand. This will directly benefit an additional 55 lakh workers. The Universal Account Number has ensured portability of EPF accounts and has safeguarded the interest of crores of workers.

28. Workers employed in the informal sector will benefit the most from my Government's decision to enable employers to pay wages to their employees through banks. This will increase compliance of payment of minimum wages. It shall ensure that workers in the unorganized sector also enjoy health benefits under Employees State Insurance Corporation and social security through Provident Fund.
29. Implementation of the 7th Pay Commission has benefited 50 lakh employees and 35 lakh pensioners. To protect senior citizens from the impact of interest-rate fluctuations, interest rate for senior citizens has been fixed at 8 percent payable monthly for a period of 10 years.

Honourable Members,

30. Social and economic equality for the deprived and disempowered sections is the first promise of our constitution. My government is committed to fulfil this promise.
31. Through the ***Stand-up India*** initiative, my government plans to empower over two and a half lakh Scheduled Castes,

Scheduled Tribes and women entrepreneurs. For promoting entrepreneurship, the National Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes Hub has been launched, with an initial allocation of Rs. 490 crore.

32. Under the Forest Rights Act, about 16.5 lakh Individual Forest Rights titles have been granted over an area of 55.4 lakh acres of forest land. Further, Community Forest Rights titles have been distributed over an area of about 47 lakh acres of forest land.
33. The location of our mineral wealth largely coincides with tribal habitations in our country. The ***Pradhan Mantri Khanij Kshetra Kalyan Yojana*** will serve the dual purpose of ensuring sustainable mining activity as well as local area development for the betterment of the tribals and the poor inhabitants in the mining areas. District Mineral Foundation is a novel initiative in this regard.
34. My government has increased the allocation under the Tribal sub-plan. Fourteen different sectors have been identified under the ***Vanbandhu Kalyan Yojana*** for the empowerment of tribals. 100 out of the 300 clusters envisaged under the ***Shyama Prasad Mukherjee Rurban Mission***, will be developed in tribal areas.

Honourable Members,

35. The success of the Indian cricket team at the World cup for the Blind, 2014 and the Indian Paralympics contingent at Rio 2016 demonstrates that our ***Divyang jan*** can scale great heights, if afforded an opportunity. My Government is committed to providing the ***Divyang jan*** equal opportunities for development. Besides increasing the percentage of reservation for ***Divyang jan*** from 3 to 4 percent in government jobs, my government has accelerated filling up of backlog vacancies. Over 6 lakh ***Divyang jan*** have so far benefitted from 4700 special assistance camps organised across the country since May 2014.
36. The ***Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan*** is improving accessibility for the ***Divyang jan*** at public places. For the first time, Speech and Language Disability, and Specific Learning Disability have been included in ***The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016***. A common sign language is being developed for the entire country. The ***Niramaya Swasthya Bima Yojana*** provides ***Divyang jan*** affected by autism, cerebral palsy, mental retardation, and those with multiple disabilities, a health insurance cover of up to One lakh rupees.

Honourable Members,

37. Like the strings of **sitar**, which produce different notes but come together to create a beautiful melody, people professing different faiths and religions constitute the spirit of India and contribute to the strength of the nation. The courage and sacrifice of **Baba Banda Singh Bahadur**, whose 300th martyrdom anniversary we observe this year; and the spirit of selfless service of **Mother Teresa**, who was canonised recently, inspire us in equal measure. My government has taken several measures to ensure that the aspirations of people from all communities are fulfilled, and a more focussed approach has been taken towards inclusive development of the notified minority communities, namely **Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, Sikhs, Parsis and Jains**. While scholarship and fellowship schemes have encouraged their educational empowerment; skill development schemes like **Seekho aur kamao, Usttad** and **Nai Manzil** have enabled their economic empowerment.

38. Just as all the drops of rainwater and streams converge in an ocean, all the policies of my government converge for the welfare of the poor, deprived and the underprivileged. From giving house to the shelter less to electrifying un-electrified villages, from giving free LPG connections to supplying LED bulbs to the poor, from **Jan Dhan** to **Jan Suraksha**, from making available affordable health care to providing quality

education to the poor --- central to all the policies of my government is the welfare of the poor.

Honourable Members,

39. Balanced and equitable development of all regions is vital to India's progress. Under its proactive **"Act East"** policy, my government is focussing on reducing the isolation of the Eastern region and North-east by improving connectivity through road, rail, air, telecom, power and waterways.
40. My Government has started the **Pradhan Mantri Urja Ganga** with the execution of Two Thousand Five Hundred kilometres long **Jagdishpur-Haldia-Bokaro-Dhamra** Natural Gas Pipeline Project. With an investment of around Rs. Twelve thousand Five hundred crore, this project will cater to energy requirements of five states, covering 40 districts and 2,600 villages. This project will also lead to the revival of three large fertilizer plants, industrialization of more than 20 cities and city gas network development in 7 cities.
41. My Government sees the North Eastern states as the **Ashtalakshmi** that can take India to new heights. The North East is the gateway to South East Asia. We are opening up road and rail routes to our neighbouring countries to boost the economic development of the region.

42. To ensure unhindered support and development of North Eastern states, my government is continuing with the special dispensation in the assistance pattern to the North-eastern states, and is providing assistance in the ratio of 90:10 for core central schemes and 80:20 for non-core schemes to these states.
43. By the end of the year, all Meter-Gauge tracks in the north-eastern states will be converted to Broad-Gauge. The railways have undertaken a major expansion in the region at a cost of around Rs. Ten thousand crore. Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya have been put on the rail map, Agartala in Tripura has been connected with broad gauge line.
44. The Brahmaputra Cracker and Polymer Limited and Numaligarh Refinery Limited's wax unit are big projects that will create huge employment opportunities in the North East region. The Government has approved North East BPO promotion scheme in the Digital India programme for creation of employment opportunities.
45. The beauty and diversity of the North East makes it a natural hub for tourism. The Ministry of Tourism has identified a thematic circuit for the North East region.
46. My government has provided special financial assistance to mitigate the damages caused by unprecedented floods in the hilly and other areas of the country.

Honourable Members,

47. From highways to i-ways; from railways to waterways; from seaports to airports; from water pipelines to gas pipelines, from earth sciences to satellites, from rural infrastructure to smart cities, creation of vital next-generation infrastructure has received special attention of my government.
48. For modernization of Railways, the highest-ever capital outlay of Rs. 1.21 lakh crore has been provided. My government aims to connect all rural habitations with all weather roads. 73,000 kilometres of road has been built so far in rural areas. More than five thousand kilometres of roads in 44 Left Wing Extremism affected districts are being upgraded. The National Civil Aviation Policy, will give a major boost to air connectivity in the smaller cities and towns. Under the **BharatNet Project**, Optical Fibre Cables now cover over 75,700 Gram Panchayats, up from only 59 in May 2014.
49. India has launched 8 operational missions covering meteorological, navigation, and earth observation and communication satellites. ISRO completed the seven-satellite constellation of Indian Regional Navigational Satellite Systems, **NavIC (नाविक)**. ISRO added another

feather to its cap this year by successfully launching 20 satellites in a highest-ever single launch.

50. My government is committed to optimally harness our marine wealth and give a new impetus to ocean-led development. Under the **Sagarmala** programme on port-led development, a total of 199 projects with an outlay of over Rs. Three lakh crore have been identified for implementation in the next three years. Of these, projects of more than Rs. One lakh crore are already under implementation. The seas surrounding the Indian Peninsula contain One thousand Three hundred and Eighty Two of our islands, out of which, to begin with, 26 have been earmarked for integrated development. The Blue Economy, with focus on sustainable development of fisheries will continue to receive our special attention.
51. As a reaffirmation of our commitment to clean energy, my government has taken giant strides in increasing our renewable energy capacity to 47 Giga Watts so far, against our target of 175 Giga Watts.
52. Placing fresh impetus on rural infrastructure, untied financial resources of over Rs. Two lakh crore are being transferred to **Gram Panchayats** during 2015-20. The allocation to **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme** in 2016-17 has been over Rs. Forty Seven

thousand crore which is the highest ever since the inception of the programme and the focus is now on creation of durable assets and rural infrastructure.

53. Giving a major boost to creation of urban infrastructure, annual action plan for 500 cities with an outlay of Rs. Fifty thousand crore has been approved. Metro Rail Projects have been sanctioned for four cities including Ahmedabad, Nagpur and Pune, and an extension of Chennai Metro has also been approved.

Honourable Members,

54. My Government has taken bold decisions in the interest of the poor.
55. To combat the evils of black-money, corruption, counterfeit currency and terror financing, my government took the decision on 8th November, 2016 to demonetize old five hundred and one thousand rupee currency notes. My Government's very first cabinet decision was to set up an SIT on black-money. The passing of **Black Money (Undisclosed Foreign Income and Assets) and Imposition of Tax Act, 2015, Benami Transactions (Prohibition) Amendment Act, 2016**, amendments to treaties with Singapore, Cyprus and Mauritius to prevent misuse of provisions in such treaties for tax evasion and

movement of black-money in India and the Taxation Amendment Act providing for ***Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana***, have together resulted in a comprehensive policy backed initiative against black-money.

56. The four-decade old demand of one-rank-one-pension (OROP) of our Armed Forces veterans has been fulfilled. The total financial implications would be around Rs. Eleven thousand crore. More than Rs. Six thousand Two hundred crore have been released in two tranches benefiting over 19.6 lakh veterans.
57. My government has taken decisive steps to give a fitting reply to the repeated incursions on our territorial sovereignty. On 29th September 2016 our defence forces successfully conducted surgical strikes at several launch pads along the Line of Control to prevent infiltration by terrorists. We are proud of the exemplary courage and valour displayed by our defence personnel and owe a debt of the gratitude to them.

Honourable Members,

58. Transforming the culture of governance, my Government has simplified procedures, repealed obsolete laws and eliminated scope for corruption.

59. The Direct Benefit Transfer programme of subsidies through the **Jan Dhan-Aadhaar-Mobile (JAM) Trinity** has prevented leakages and helped save Rs Thirty Six thousand crore. PAHAL is the world's largest cash benefit transfer scheme that has saved over Rs. Twenty One thousand crore in two years. **Digidhan Abhiyaan** and Two lakh Common Service Centres are providing employment to over 5 lakh youth, and spreading digital literacy.
60. The launch of mobile app - **BHIM** - Bharat Interface for Money - is a tribute to the vision of Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar who sought economic empowerment of the poorest. Within a few days, it has become one of the most popular mobile app-based payment mechanisms in the country. The biometric AADHAAR Payment system to be launched soon will usher a technological revolution in India.
61. Coal block and spectrum auctions illustrate the highest standards of transparency set by my government in allocation of natural resources. To carry this forward, government procurements have been brought under a single platform - **Government eMarket Place (GeM)**.
62. The process of recruitment to government jobs has been made simpler and transparent by dispensing with interviews for recruitments to over Thirty Four lakh non-gazetted posts. The process of appointments to senior positions in

government has also been streamlined and is guided solely by objectivity, merit and integrity.

63. Over Eleven hundred obsolete laws have been repealed and 400 more are in the process of being repealed. Legislations relating to ***Women, Divyang jan, Labour, Apprentices, Factories, Benami Transactions, Aadhaar*** and ***Real Estate***, to mention a few - mirrors my Government's guiding philosophy of Transparency, and Social Justice.

Honourable Members,

64. Frequent elections put on hold development programmes, disrupt normal public life, and impact essential services and burden human resource with prolonged periods of election duty. My government welcomes a constructive debate on simultaneous conduct of elections to Lok Sabha and the State Legislative Assemblies. Funding of elections to eradicate the misuse of money power also needs to be debated. My Government would welcome any decision taken by the Election Commission in this regard after consultations with political parties.

Honourable Members,

65. Celebrating the cultural diversity along with the richness of language and heritage of every state, my government has

started the ***Ek Bharat Shrestha Bharat*** programme. The uniqueness of this programme is to pair and entwine two different states with diverse cultures for over a year so that each state can assimilate the cultural spirit of the other.

66. Taking forward the concept of cooperative federalism through ***One nation-One tax and One nation-One market***, both Houses of Parliament passed the ***Goods and Services Tax Act***. 17 states governed by political parties across the political spectrum ratified this in a record 23 days. My Government is thankful to the GST Council for working to resolve outstanding issues.

Honourable Members,

67. India has been widely acclaimed as a bright spot in the global economy, at a time when global growth has been slow. The rate of inflation, the balance of payments, current account deficit and the fiscal deficit have been consistently reduced since 2014. Foreign Direct Investment and foreign exchange reserves have reached record levels. The country's macroeconomic fundamentals are very strong, creating a platform for sustained high growth.
68. FDI inflows in 2015-16 were US \$ 55.6 billion, the highest-ever for any financial year. My Government further liberalized FDI policy provisions in various sectors in June 2016.

69. My Government is closely working with the State Governments to identify constraints in doing business. The rankings of the States/UTs show that the national implementation average of reforms stands at around 49 percent, much higher than last year's 32 percent. India is ranked third in the list of top prospective host economies for 2016-18 in the World Investment Report 2016 released by UNCTAD (अंकटाड).

Honourable Members,

70. India has been facing the grave challenge of terrorism for the last four decades. Terrorism poses a serious danger to the global community. India will actively collaborate with other nations in decisively defeating these forces. My government is committed to combating terrorism, and to ensure that the perpetrators of such acts are brought to justice.

71. The State of Jammu and Kashmir has been affected by terrorism sponsored and supported from across the border. The attempts of infiltration, incidents of terrorist violence and loss of precious lives of civilians and security personnel remain a cause of grave concern.

72. There has been considerable success in containing Left Wing Extremism over the last three years, with the surrender

of over 2600 extremists. The security situation in the North Eastern states has also shown significant improvement.

Honourable Members,

73. My Government, committed to the philosophy of partnerships for peace and progress, continues its active diplomacy aimed at facilitating national development, enhancing our security, and ensuring greater Indian influence in global fora.

74. The intensity of our international engagements has helped us shape a diverse and purposeful agenda with our global partners. There has been a consolidation of relations with friendly countries and major powers. The common desire of the South Asian region for greater prosperity and development led most of its nations to make common cause in their opposition to terrorism. Membership of the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) and signing of the Memorandum of Obligations of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation were further reflections of India's growing and multi-dimensional role in global affairs.

75. India hosted the eighth BRICS Summit at Goa with its BIMSTEC outreach, and the sixth Heart of Asia Conference at Amritsar, marking important contributions to our regional and pluri-lateral outreach. India hosted a three day Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Delhi,

in which more than 50 Asian and Pacific countries participated.

76. There are over Thirty million Overseas Indians, settled in almost every corner of the world. They continue to make invaluable contributions to Indian society and economy. My government will maximize the strengths of Indian **diaspora** in nation building and for deepening our global outreach.
77. Realising the importance of developing tourism, my Government has approved the new **e-VISA** policy and expanded the scope of e-tourist visa to include purposes such as short-term medical treatment and business trips. 161 countries are now covered under e-VISA. With over 88 lakh foreign tourist arrivals in 2016, tourism sector has shown a growth rate of over 10 percent.
78. India ratified the Paris agreement on 2nd October 2016, thereby sending a strong message of our commitment to combating climate change with focus on climate justice and sustainable lifestyle. The United Nations Environment Programme has recognized India as one of the countries on track in achieving its voluntary goals. 25 nations have signed the Framework Agreement of International Solar Alliance, the first treaty based organisation initiated by India.

Honourable Members,

79. Indians today have a deep sense of pride in the awakening of India caused by the momentous steps my government has undertaken. Our fellow citizens have exhibited great solidarity with our endeavours in transforming India. My government reiterates its commitment to fulfil the aspirations of our citizens. The Vision of ***Mahatma Gandhi and other founding fathers*** lays down a great path for a resurgent India. This path is of debate, discussion, accommodation and understanding. It is the rich tradition of ***Samvaad, Samanvay*** and ***Samvedna*** that will continue to guide the spirit of our nation building.

Honourable Members,

80. We gather here today to redeem the trust reposed by our countrymen, particularly the poor, in the sacred Institution of Parliament. Every action of ours, in this temple of democracy must be an offering at the altar of the innumerable sacrifices that have built this nation. Let us work towards a common future, seeded in the promise of ***Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas***, that will bring to all the equality and dignity enshrined in our constitution.

Jai Hind!