

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB  
MUKHERJEE AT THE MEMORIAL LECTURE ON LATE SHRI P.V.  
NARASIMHA RAO**

Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh: 31-12-2012

1. I am indeed happy to be here today to deliver the first memorial lecture of a great son of our soil, the late Shri P.V. Narasimha Rao. He was our Prime Minister, a deft practitioner of realpolitik, a great intellectual, an erudite scholar, thinker, writer and linguist and someone who would be remembered for his historic contributions to the country.
2. Born in a remote village of Andhra Pradesh, he strived hard for the welfare of the country and rose to be its Prime Minister. Influenced early in life by Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, his disposition to devote his life for society was clear from his spirited participation in the nation's freedom struggle starting when he was only around 16 years of age.
3. Shri Rao was a leader who inspired many. I too am one of them. I had the opportunity to work with Shri Rao for many years and was impressed by his political sagacity, his depth of comprehension of complex issues and his steely resolve to find solutions to even the most intractable of them.
4. Late Shri Narasimha Rao, who was fondly called PV by many, will be remembered for his many contributions to the nation foremost amongst which, in my opinion, is his sterling success in taking the nation to the next level of reforms in 1991. These economic reforms enabled the nation to traverse the path of realization of its economic potential.
5. He assumed the reins of the Prime Minister of India at a time when the country was confronted by severe economic problems. It was a period when India's foreign currency reserves had plummeted to around US\$ 1 billion that was barely sufficient to finance two weeks of imports.
6. Faced with the financial crisis, in an unprecedented and courageous move, he departed from the usual policy of

appointing a senior political leader as the Finance Minister. Instead, he appointed Dr. Manmohan Singh our present Prime Minister as Finance Minister. He is an economic administrator and a well-known economist himself. He gained rich experience in policy making as the Economic Affairs Secretary and RBI Governor. He was entrusted as the doctor, with the responsibility of nursing and strengthening the economy. Shri Rao displayed great foresight in making this choice and as the present bears witness, this was a brilliant decision that could not have come at a more appropriate time.

7. Shri Rao gave Dr. Manmohan Singh full freedom to navigate the crisis and introduce far-reaching economic reforms. He lent full support to Dr. Manmohan Singh and the two together, took the nation on a path that has made India an economic powerhouse that the world today admires.
8. The duo of the practical politician and the economist Finance Minister, thus steered the nation through the economic crisis, admirably ushering in the seminal policy of economic liberalization. In fact, Shri Rao had himself spearheaded the move for dismantling the license regime as the Prime Minister while holding additional charge of the Industry Ministry.
9. That a large number of big Indian corporate houses have today become the powerhouses of growth and have earned their spurs across the globe is in part on account of the vision of Shri Rao. It is these economic reforms that were ushered in during his tenure as the Prime Minister, that have charted the course of our economic history since then.
10. The economic reforms unlocked the entrepreneurial skills of the Indian mind cutting across the various sectors of the economy. In the financial sector, measures to bring capital adequacy and prudent norms for asset classification in our banks, licensing of new private banks, besides gradual decontrol of foreign exchange and currency convertibility were implemented.

11. With the objective of providing market orientation and to make our public sector enterprises competitive, private sector participation was encouraged through privatization and disinvestment. Other sectoral reforms such as liberalization of foreign investment norms, external trade and tax reforms spawned the much-needed change in the incentive structure of the economy. These measures unleashed the productive and competitive spirit dormant in our businesses. The reforms in many ways signaled the transformation of the 'State' as a facilitator than as a direct provider of goods and services.
12. The nature of the economic reforms appeared to some as revolutionary and encouraged many to oppose them. But it did not dampen the enthusiasm of Shri Rao who faced strong political challenges to sustain these reforms. It required the strong courage and conviction that Late Shri Narasimha Rao displayed in abundant measure.
13. But, the adoption of the policy of liberalization did not signal the end of the role of the state in pursuing the important task of social development. This is where the pragmatism of Shri Rao was writ large. While he recognized the need for a greater role for the private sector in the development of the nation's economy, he simultaneously emphasized the importance of state intervention in the development of human capital that was given the position of primacy in the Eighth Five Year Plan.
14. Towards the achievement of this goal, emphasis was laid on employment generation, literacy, education, health, drinking water and provision of adequate food and basic infrastructure. The Government was fully willing to take the primary responsibility for providing the basic elements that would help the development of human capital. These policies resulted in greater employment, reduction in poverty and self-sufficiency in agriculture and achieving 6.5% economic growth, the highest ever until then for any Five Year plan period.
15. Another important decision was India's accession to the WTO in January 1995 and Shri Rao's role in it was pivotal. The Uruguay round of multilateral trade negotiations, wide

ranging agreements including the creation of WTO to subsume GATT had come to a halt and India's position under the then Government of VP Singh was hesitant and ambivalent. The implications of India acceding to an all-encompassing multilateral trade regime met with strong domestic opposition. I, as the then Commerce Minister, signed the multilateral WTO Trade Agreement at Marrakesh in April 1994 along with other nations.

16. His achievements were not limited to the economic sector alone. Displaying great political sagacity, he was able to resolve many complex problems. It was during his term as the Prime Minister that the extremist activities in Punjab saw its end. A popular government was able to function after the elections under Beant Singh. In ending the occupation of the Hazratbal shrine in Jammu & Kashmir by terrorist in 1993 without any damage to the holy shrine.
17. Ladies and Gentlemen, late Narasimha Rao had a unique functioning style. He understood the virtue of patience and depending on the exigencies of the situation, he was ready to wait till he achieved consensus. When he decided to refrain from acting, it was with a singular purpose. To quote him: "When I don't make a decision, it is not that I don't think about it. I think about it and make a decision not to make a decision." But, when it came to matters of administration and governance, his decision making abilities were writ large in the speed and decisive manner in which they were implemented.
18. It was his unique style and political deftness that made him successful in leading a Congress minority Government after the 1991 General elections that gave the Congress party 232 MPs in the 10<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha. Yet his Government survived for the full five-year term and he achieved his feat laying the foundation for politics based on consensus.
19. Shri Rao is also credited with exemplary achievement in the foreign policy. He was the Minister for External Affairs for around seven years during which he gave the nation some new foreign policy focus. He steered the nation in the aftermath of Cold War building strong relations across the

world and gave further impetus to the nation's nuclear and ballistic missile programme.

20. The visionary that he was, late Narasimha Rao launched the 'Look East' policy and gave India's engagement with ASEAN a different meaning. India became a Sectoral Dialogue partner of ASEAN in 1992 and a full Dialogue Partner in 1996. The different dimensions of engagement culminating in Summit level partnership with ASEAN in the areas of trade, economic, culture and politics have since gained in strength bringing many benefits to our country and are directly attributable to the vision of Shri Rao.
21. As the Minister for Human Resources Development, he implemented the vision of late Shri Rajiv Gandhi to bring quality education to the poor and the marginalised by establishing the Navodaya Vidyalayas. These have today grown into a chain of schools that is providing education to about 1.60 lakh students from the marginalised sections of the society. It is heartening to know that around 77% of students of these schools hail from rural areas. And most importantly these schools have also had the highest pass percentage in Class X and XII, amongst all categories of schools.
22. Shri Rao's contribution also immensely benefited his home state of Andhra Pradesh. First as a Minister and then as Chief Minister, he is credited with several far-reaching reforms. As the Minister of Education in Andhra Pradesh, he took several initiatives that made the educational institutions more responsive to the needs of students. He gave special emphasis on upgrading education in the field of Science and Technology.
23. As Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh from 1971 to 1973, he was steadfast in his commitments towards the implementation of Land Ceiling Act in the State. This Act became one of the most effective Land Ceiling Acts in the country. He had initiated these reforms amidst strong opposition with the singular goal of ushering in equity by bring benefit to the poor and the landless. This made him one of the most forward-looking Chief Ministers of the state and his time.

24. Ladies and Gentlemen, behind the political persona of Late Shri Narasimha Rao, which people are familiar with, there was also a man of letters, a distinguished scholar and linguist, whose command over 16 languages pleasantly surprised both Indians and foreigners alike. He wrote fictions in Hindi, Marathi and Telugu, and translated literary works. His novel, 'The Insider', describes a man's rise through the ranks of Indian politics won accolades for its treatment of the contemporary politics in India.
  
25. The late Shri P.V. Narasimha Rao will be remembered as a great leader of our country and one who showed the courage of conviction in leading the nation through the right path of reforms against the heaviest odds. Shri Narasimha Rao is one of the few leaders who attracted admirers of different political hues.
  
26. The nation would remember him with gratitude and I am particularly delighted in having been given the opportunity to deliver the first lecture in his memory.

Jai Hind

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