

**ADDRESS BY THE HON'BLE PRESIDENT OF INDIA
SMT. DROUPADI MURMU
AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE 16TH ASOSAI ASSEMBLY**

New Delhi, September 24, 2024

It is indeed with a great pleasure that I am addressing this august gathering of distinguished delegates of Asian Organisation of Supreme Audit institution known as ASOSAI. I offer my warm welcome to all of you.

The profession of audit and accounting is as old as civilisation itself. In India, we have scriptures which talked about how fiscal prudence and financial probity are critical elements of statecraft. Similar references can also be found in the civilisational journey of Egypt, Greece and Rome. In this historical context, I regard the 16th Assembly of the ASOSAI as a continuity of the humanity's efforts to evolve a better and prosperous society by adhering to the canons of fiscal prudence and financial probity.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The CAG of India plays a key role in ensuring transparency and accountability in the country's public finance. It was not without reason that the Indian Constitution vested the office of CAG with a wide mandate and complete autonomy. While explaining the role of CAG in the Constituent Assembly, Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, the architect of our Constitution, had aptly described the CAG as "the most important officer in the Constitution of India".

I believe that the office of the CAG has lived up to the expectations of the Constitution-makers. It follows a strict code of ethical and moral conduct that ensures the highest order of probity in its functioning. What is equally important for effective auditing of public finances is timeliness.

If a wrong is pointed out well within time, it can be corrected. This implies that an auditor is entrusted with the task of not only pointing out faults but also suggest a way out to improve the quality of governance.

The mandate of public sector audits has expanded beyond traditional auditing to include assessing the effectiveness of public welfare schemes and projects, ensuring that they serve all citizens equitably. In an increasingly technology-driven world, more and more public services are being delivered using technology. Audit, therefore, needs to keep up with the technological evolution in order to be able to perform its oversight functions effectively.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, we are at a critical juncture where emerging digital technologies like artificial intelligence, data analytics, machine learning and geo-spatial technology are becoming the backbone of modern governance. Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) serves as the foundation to support and enhance the functioning of the digital economy and services provided to citizens.

I am told that the theme of the Symposium held along with the Assembly is public service delivery through digital public infrastructure. From digital identities to e-governance platforms, DPI has the potential to revolutionise the delivery of public services and goods, making them more accessible, efficient, and inclusive. Indeed, we have seen the transformation that DPI has ushered in India.

I am particularly happy to note that one of the sub-themes for discussion is the issue of potential disparities in access to digital infrastructure, a subject very close to my heart. In many parts of the world, women and vulnerable sections of the society have less access to digital technologies, fewer opportunities to develop digital skills, and are under-represented in the digital economy. This divide not only limits their ability

to access essential services but also perpetuates inequality. This is where the role of Supreme Audit Institutions becomes crucial. As auditors, you have the unique responsibility and opportunity to ensure that digital public infrastructure is designed and implemented in a way that is inclusive and accessible to all.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Mahatma Gandhi, Father of our Nation, is an inspiring figure for all of us, but he should be a role model especially for independent Supreme Audit Institutions too. He began his career in public service in South Africa with the launch of the Natal Indian Congress. In 1894, when he was barely 25 years old, he took pains to explain a discrepancy of six pence in the annual report of that organisation. In all his life, handling large amounts of public donations for various causes, he remained as meticulous as ever. It is said that in his account books, the expression “miscellaneous” was a taboo. He regarded carefully kept accounts as a must for any organisation. He said, [and I quote] “Without properly kept accounts it is impossible to maintain truth in its pristine purity.” [Unquote] He would have wanted public auditors to speak truth – without ambiguity. Sharpness and bluntness are opposing qualities, but an ideal public auditor is one who combines them.

Instead, the financial world is often beset by opaque accounting practices. In this setting, the role of independent Supreme Audit Institutions is to see that public resources are managed efficiently, effectively and with the utmost integrity. Audits and evaluations by SAIs not only safeguard public funds, but also enhance public confidence in governance.

With Asia emerging as the continent that is setting global economic agenda, all of you carry the onerous task of improving the lives of more than half of the humanity. I am told that ASOSAI as a regional group of the International Organisation of Supreme Audit Institutions collaborates internationally to improve standards of people’s life. This is a remarkable

feat. In the recent conference of the Supreme Audit Institutions of G20 countries at Goa, the member nations resolved to collaborate, learn and emulate the best audit practices from each other. This resolution is consistent with the age-old spirit of India: “Vasudhaiv Kutumbkam” – the whole world is but a family.

I am told that ASOSAI began its journey from New Delhi in 1979. So today you are coming back to your roots. The institution of CAG of India has a rich history of public auditing. I am confident that SAI India, as hosts of the 16th ASOSAI Assembly will have lot to offer in the deliberations of the learned minds gathered here.

I would also like to congratulate SAI India for assuming the Chairmanship of ASOSAI for the period 2024 to 2027. This is the fourth occasion when CAG of India will Chair the ASOSAI. This is a momentous occasion, not just for SAI India but for us as a nation. I am confident that under the able stewardship of the CAG of India, ASOSAI will reach new heights, fostering greater cooperation and innovation among the members.

I wish you fruitful discussions and a successful Assembly ahead. Together, you can work towards a future where audits contribute not only to transparency and accountability but also to a more inclusive and equitable society.

I am hopeful that in addition to the official deliberations, you will have an opportunity to explore and enjoy the rich and diverse Indian culture. I wish you all a comfortable and enjoyable stay in India.

Thank you,
Jai Hind!