

**ACCEPTANCE SPEECH BY SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE ON HIS
ASSUMPTION OF OFFICE AS PRESIDENT OF INDIA**

Smt. Pratibha Devisingh Patil,
Shri Hamid Ansari,
Smt. Meira Kumar,
Shri Justice S.H. Kapadia,
Members of Parliament,
Your Excellencies, Friends and fellow citizens,

I am deeply moved by the high honour you have accorded to me. Such honour exalts the occupant of this office, even as it demands that he rises above personal or partisan interests in the service of the national good.

The principal responsibility of this office is to function as the guardian of our Constitution. I will strive, as I said on oath, to preserve, protect and defend our Constitution not just in word but also in spirit. We are all, across the divide of party and region, partners at the altar of our motherland. Our federal Constitution embodies the idea of modern India: it defines not only India but also modernity. A modern nation is built on some basic fundamentals: democracy, or equal rights for every citizen; secularism, or equal freedom to every faith; equality of every region and language; gender equality and, perhaps most important of all, economic equity. For our development to be real the poorest of our land must feel that they are part of the narrative of rising India.

I have seen vast, perhaps unbelievable, changes during the journey that has brought me from the flicker of a lamp in a small Bengal village to the chandeliers of Delhi. I was a boy when Bengal was savaged by a famine that killed millions; the misery and sorrow is still not lost on me. We have achieved much in the field of agriculture, industry and social infrastructure; but that is

nothing compared to what India, led by the coming generations, will create in the decades ahead.

Our national mission must continue to be what it was when the generation of Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel, Rajendra Prasad, Ambedkar and Maulana Azad offered us a tryst with destiny: to eliminate the curse of poverty, and create such opportunities for the young that they can take our India forward by quantum leaps. There is no humiliation more abusive than hunger. Trickle-down theories do not address the legitimate aspirations of the poor. We must lift those at the bottom so that poverty is erased from the dictionary of modern India.

What has brought us thus far, will take us further ahead. India's true story is the partnership of the people. Our wealth has been created by farmers and workers, industrialists and service-providers, soldiers and civilians. Our social harmony is the sublime co-existence of temple, mosque, church, gurudwara and synagogue; they are symbols of our unity in diversity.

Peace is the first ingredient of prosperity. History has often been written in the red of blood; but development and progress are the luminous rewards of a peace dividend, not a war trophy. The two halves of the 20th Century tell their own story. Europe, and indeed the world, reinvented itself after the end of the Second World War and the collapse of colonization, leading to the rise of great institutions like the United Nations. Leaders who ordered great armies into the field, and then understood that war was more barbarism than glory, transformed the world by changing its mindset. Gandhiji taught by example, and gave us the supreme strength of non-violence. India's philosophy is not an abstract in textbooks. It flourishes in the day-to-day life of our people, who value the humane above all else. Violence is external to our nature; when, as human beings, we do err, we exorcise our sins with penitence and accountability.

But the visible rewards of peace have also obscured the fact that the age of war is not over. We are in the midst of a fourth world war; the third was the Cold War, but it was very warm in Asia, Africa and Latin America till it ended in the early 1990s. The war against terrorism is the fourth; and it is a world war because it can raise its evil head anywhere in the world. India has been on the frontlines of this war long before many other recognized its vicious depth or poisonous consequences. I am proud of the valour and conviction and steely determination of our Armed Forces as they have fought this menace on our borders; of our brave police forces as they have met the enemy within; and of our people, who have defeated the terrorist trap by remaining calm in the face of extraordinary provocation. The people of India have been a beacon of maturity through the trauma of whiplash wounds. Those who instigate violence and perpetuate hatred need to understand one truth. Few minutes of peace will achieve far more than many years of war. India is content with itself, and driven by the will to sit on the high table of prosperity. It will not be deflected in its mission by noxious practitioners of terror.

As Indians, we must of course learn from the past; but we must remain focused on the future. In my view, education is the alchemy that can bring India its next golden age. Our oldest scriptures laid the framework of society around the pillars of knowledge; our challenge is to convert knowledge into a democratic force by taking it into every corner of our country. Our motto is unambiguous: All for knowledge, and knowledge for all.

The weight of office sometimes becomes a burden on dreams. The news is not always cheerful. Corruption is an evil that can depress the nation's mood and sap its progress. We cannot allow our progress to be hijacked by the greed of a few.

I envisage an India where unity of purpose propels the common good; where Centre and State are driven by the single vision of good governance;

where every revolution is green; where democracy is not merely the right to vote once in five years but to speak **always** in the citizen's interest; where knowledge becomes wisdom; where the young pour their phenomenal energy and talent into the collective cause. As tyranny dwindles across the world; as democracy gets fresh life in regions once considered inhospitable; India becomes the model of modernity.

As Swami Vivekananda in his soaring metaphor said, India will be raised, not with the power of flesh but with the power of the spirit, not with the flag of destruction, but with the flag of peace and love. Bring all the forces of good together. Do not care what be your colour-green, blue or red, but mix all the colours up and produce that intense glow of white, the colour of love.

Ours is to work, the results will take care of themselves.

There is no greater reward for a public servant than to be elected the first citizen of our Republic.

Jai Hind