

SPEECH OF SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE, FORMER PRESIDENT OF INDIA ON THE OCCASSION OF '10th ANNUAL NATIONAL CONCLAVE OF BHARTIYA CHHATRA SANSAD (INDIAN STUDENT PARLIAMENT)'

1. I am happy to be present here today at the conclusion of the 10th Annual Conclave of the Bharatiya Chatra Sansad. Let me begin by Congratulating Shri Amrinder Singh, Chief Minister of Punjab for being conferred with the ***Adarsh Mukhyamantri Puraskar (Ideal Chief Minister Award)***.
2. An ideal Chief Minister is synonymous with good governance in his state. Good governance is not a given in any system. It has to be nurtured by carefully developing effective, accountable and efficient institutions of delivery within the broad democratic framework. Strengthening, re-invigorating and re-inventing these institutions to meet the needs of the time

is a continuous process. It calls for wider involvement of the civil society. It entails free and open participation in the political processes by the people. It calls for ever-increasing engagement of the youth in the processes of democracy. It also calls for ethical and responsible behaviour from all stake holders, including the mass media. I once again congratulate Captain Amrinder Singh, a friend and colleague of long standing for imbibing these principles in letter and spirit.

3. Good governance is critically dependent on prerequisites like inviolable adherence to rule of law, existence of participatory decision-making structure, responsiveness, transparency, accountability, corruption-free society, equity and inclusiveness. In short, good governance implies a framework that has the well-being of the people as its focal point and I hope that the students present here – the Chhatra Sansads (Student Parliamentarians) would have imbibed these guiding mantras over the last three days.

4. **Bhartiya Chhatra Sansad**, in its decade long existence has become an important aspect of our ever evolving educational landscape. I am told that their alumni are spread across the length and breadth of our nation and have successfully captured the imagination of our spirited youth, while enriching our body politic with fresh ideas towards strengthening Democracy.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen and my dear students,

5. We have entered the 71st year of our Republic. Democracy and Republicanism are two values which we must not only strive to protect, but also cherish, celebrate and treasure. **Democracy is the rule of, for and by the people and the Republic signifies the rule of law.**

6. **India's tryst with Democracy is a story which needs to be told time and again.** We are a nation of 12,69,219 (Twelve lakh, Sixty Nine Thousand, Two

Hundred and Nineteen) square miles, practicing 7 major religions, speaking 122 languages and 1600 dialects in their everyday lives, belonging to 3 major ethnic groups – Caucasians, Mongoloids, and Dravidians – **guided solely by the Constitution of India which is our Magna Carta.**

7. It is our founding fathers, who drafted our Constitution and wanted India's giant leap of faith in democracy to get truly ingrained. We chose to bring about a peaceful political revolution through '**One Person, One Vote**' i.e. **Universal Adult Franchise.** This giant political leap was to foster the socio-economic transformation of India. When we chose to adopt Democracy, it was confined to a narrow spectrum of industrially and educationally advanced nations of the West. India became the world's largest democracy and remains so, as our population nearly quadrupled between the Census of 1951 and 2011.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen and my dear students,

8. The world watched disbelievingly as the first Indian elections commenced over a span of four months from 25 October 1951 to 21 February 1952. It was the biggest democratic exercise in history, at that point. It was an exercise of massive logistical proportions. The electorate comprised of 176 million people, of whom 86% were illiterate. It was not just one election, but two since provincial assemblies were also elected at the same time. Nearly 620,000,000 (6.2 Crore) ballot papers printed. Over 2,24,000 polling booths, one assigned almost for over 1000 voters were established; 2.5 million plus steel ballot-boxes were made; 17,500 candidates from over 14 national and 63 regional or local parties and a large number of independents contested for; 489 seats to the Lok Sabha and 3,283 seats to the state assemblies; 98 seats in the Lok Sabha and 669 seats in state assemblies were reserved for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes.

9. **The deepening and diffusion of Democracy in India did not go without its share of challenges.** I would like to briefly note five such instances, when the maturity of Indian Democracy helped in strengthening our intrinsic belief in democratic ethos.

a. **The foremost achievement of the First General Election lies in the fact that it cemented the painstakingly brought about unification of India.** Despite the complex arrangement of categorization under parts A, B, C and D of the Provinces, States, Territory and areas, **the entire geographical territory of India voted as a singular electorate electing for themselves a single Union Parliament.** Ofcourse, by the time the second General Elections happened, the complex categorization had been done away with, since there were just states and UTs in existence. Our geographical electoral map changed only when territories associated with Pondicherry in 1954, Goa,

Daman & Diu in 1961 and Sikkim in 1975 joined the Indian Union.

- b. The participation of the Communist Party of India (CPI) in the Constituent Assembly elections even though they were peripherally opposed to it.**
- c. The third victory of Indian democratic principles was the successful suppression of the radical and violent rebellion in Naxalbari through the ballot paper.**
- d. Democracy in India also gave rise to Identity based politics.** Purely from the lens of deepening democracy, I see this as a positive development because it leads to wider representation. However, an electorate divided on caste and community lines throws up a polarised mandate
- e. Indian democracy and its inherent power of assimilation have successfully thwarted insurgency and separate movements and elections have successfully co-opted varied**

groups into the electoral mainstream. The various accords – Punjab Accord, the Shillong Accord, the Mizo Accord, the Assam Accord and **the recent Agreement on Bru- Reang and Bodo people are examples of the same.**

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

10. The sovereign Constituent Assembly of India, representing the will of its people drafted our Constitution whose preamble set out our way forward. It guided the legislators, institutions and the citizens to forge a nation that secures for all its citizens, **“Justice, Liberty, Equality and Fraternity.”**

Dear Friends,

11. As the nation now celebrates the **150th Birth Anniversary of our Father of the Nation**, Mahatma Gandhi, the challenge before us is to realize the guiding

principle of Indian democracy as envisioned by our Gandhiji namely, **“It is one where the weakest should have the same opportunity as the strongest.”** Democracy should provide for an enabling environment which helps every section of the society to fully participate in the process of governance. I am sure you which also represent a ‘Youth Parliament’ – **Bhartiya Chhatra Sandad** would also live up to this task and work relentlessly in achieving the India of Gandhiji’s dream.

I wish you all the best and a bright future ahead.

Thank You

Jai Hind
