

Vice President's Secretariat

‘International Day of Persons with Disabilities’ must be renamed as ‘International Day of Persons with Special Abilities’: Vice President;

Calls for building an inclusive society sensitive to the needs of differently-abled

Creation of accessible infrastructure is of paramount importance: VP

Schools must inculcate sensitivity towards disability among children early in their lives: VP;

Calls for enhanced road safety and workplace safety to prevent debilitating accidents

Changing social attitude towards disability is crucial: VP;

Need to encourage good cinema on the topic of disability: VP

Presents National Awards for the Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities -2019

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The Vice President, Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu today said that ‘International Day of Persons with Disabilities’ must be renamed as **‘International Day of Persons with Special Abilities’**, to reflect the enormous potential and capabilities that differently-abled people possess and to dispel the stigma that society attaches to disability. “They are certainly role models for many others and can make immense contribution to the cause of nation building, given the right kind of environment and opportunities”, he added.

He was addressing the gathering after presenting the National Awards for the

Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities on the occasion of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities.

Expressing deep concern at the evidently severe problems faced by differently-abled, in terms of their social and economic conditions, Shri Naidu said that we must build an inclusive society that is respectful and sensitive to the needs of the differently-abled.

He spoke of the need to provide right nutrition and care to pregnant mothers and young children and to create good and accessible medical facilities across rural India.

Stating that early identification of disability is crucial, he said that it would enable us to undertake effective interventions from the beginning for rehabilitation measures and empowerment of the affected persons. "There is also a need to harmonize the immunization and disease prevention programmes with appropriate rehabilitatory models at least at the District level", he added, citing eradication of Polio is an excellent example of such coordinated efforts.

To minimise the disabilities from accidents, we need to improve road and workplace safety.

Referring to government reports that say road injuries caused 65% more disabilities in 2016 than in 1990, the Vice President called for improving road safety and spreading awareness about safe driving. He termed the recent amendments in Motor Vehicles Act as a step in the right direction.

The Vice President emphasized that a change in society's attitude towards disability is crucial and added that differently-abled persons are not objects of 'sympathy' and 'pity' and must instead be given 'empathy' and 'support'.

Shri Naidu said that all schools must strive to inculcate sensitivity towards disability in children early in their lives.

He applauded mainstream Indian cinema for creating many appreciable movies on the topic of disability and said that it is a good trend that needs to be further encouraged to change people's perception about disability.

The Vice President applauded the Government's initiatives to systematically address the challenges faced by the persons with disabilities, such as the amendment of Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act in 2016.

Stating that education is the key to empowerment of every person including persons with disabilities, Shri Naidu called for setting up more inclusive schools and special schools to ensure that each disabled child gets good quality education.

Observing that creating accessible environment for persons with disabilities is of paramount importance, the Vice President said that there is a need to develop collaborative efforts among all stakeholders for developing barrier free environment

for the Persons with Disabilities. He urged the corporate and the private entities to take all steps possible to make their infrastructure accessible to persons with disabilities.

Speaking of the need to include persons with disabilities in social and cultural activities, especially in sporting events, Shri Naidu said that it would instil a sense of inclusion and confidence amongst the persons with disabilities. He also applauded our sportspersons have constantly done country proud in Paralympics.

Shri Thaawarchand Gehlot, Hon'ble Union Minister of Social Justice & Empowerment, Shri Krishan Pal Gurjar, Hon'ble Minister of State for Social Justice & Empowerment, Shri Ramdas Athavale, Hon'ble Minister of State for Social Justice & Empowerment, Shri Rattan Lal Kataria, Hon'ble Minister of State for Social Justice & Empowerment and others were present on the occasion.

Following is the full text of the speech –

“Dear Sisters and brothers,

It is indeed a pleasure for me to be present amidst you on this occasion of presentation of National Awards for the empowerment of persons with disabilities on the occasion of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities.

The name of this ‘Day’ should have been the International Day of Persons with Special Abilities.

We have many of these remarkable men and women with special abilities amidst us who have excelled in a number of fields. Given the right kind of environment and opportunities they can make immense contribution to the cause of nation building.

Today, we are honouring some of these great achievers for their achievements.

I congratulate all the award winners who have shown extraordinary grit and determination.

I deeply appreciate their persistence and courage.

They are certainly role models for many others.

Sisters and brothers,

India has one of the highest numbers of people with disabilities globally.

According to the Census of India 2011, there are 2.68 crore Persons with Disabilities in our country, which constitutes 2.21% of our population.

I fear that this number may still be higher as many persons, specially because those with mental health issues often hide them due to social stigma attached to these

ailments.

Sisters and brothers,

Evidently, differently-abled persons face severe problems in terms of their social and economic conditions.

As we have committed to build an inclusive society - a society that is respectful and sensitive to the needs of its most vulnerable sections, we have an onerous responsibility.

We need to study and analyse various dimensions of disability comprehensively.

We need to identify the causes of disability and find ways to deal with them so that each individual is empowered to live a life of dignity.

There is an urgent need to provide right nutrition and care to pregnant mothers and young children and also create good and accessible medical facilities across rural India.

Early identification of disability is also important. This would enable us to undertake effective interventions from the beginning for rehabilitation measures and empowerment of the affected persons.

There is a need to harmonize the immunization and disease prevention programmes with appropriate rehabilitatory models at least at the District level.

Eradication of polio is an excellent example of such coordinated efforts.

To minimise the disabilities from accidents, we need to improve road and workplace safety.

A government report tells us that road injuries caused 65% more disabilities in 2016 than in 1990.

I fear, if current trends continue, road accidents may become the leading cause of death and disability in the country.

Therefore, we need to work seriously towards improving road safety and spread awareness about safe driving. Recent amendments in Motor Vehicles Act are a step in the right direction.

A major challenge that people with special abilities face is the society's attitude towards them. People often see a person with disabilities as an object of 'sympathy' and 'pity'. This leads to a low self-esteem.

What is needed is not 'sympathy' and 'pity'. Rather, it is 'empathy' and 'support' that are required.

It was this feeling of respect that underlies the new nomenclature given by the Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi when he called the disabled 'Divyang' replacing the old word of 'Vikalang'.

Dear sisters and brothers,

I recently attended an event in the Parliament House in which children from underprivileged backgrounds performed national anthem in sign language. It was such a moving experience.

I would suggest all schools to consider adopting this. It would be a good way to inculcate sensitivity towards disability among the children early in their lives.

Further, to change social attitude towards disability, we need to create greater awareness about people who have scaled great heights in different spheres like music, mathematics, science, sports and mountaineering.

I am happy that the mainstream Indian cinema has come up with many appreciable movies on the topic of disability such as -Taare Zameen Par, Black and Paa to name a few.

It is a good trend and needs to be further encouraged. It'll go a long way in shaping people's perception about disability.

Dear sisters and brothers,

I am glad that the Government has taken a number of initiatives to systematically address the challenges faced by the persons with disabilities.

The Government amended the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act in 2016. This has created a very progressive 'right-based' framework for the welfare of our differently abled brothers and sisters.

The quota of reservation for persons with disabilities has been increased from 3% to 4% in government jobs and 3% to 5% in higher education institutions.

Education is the key to empowerment of every person including persons with disabilities. I strongly believe that there should be a special focus on inclusive schools and also special schools so that each disabled child gets good quality education.

A number of Non-Governmental Organisations have been playing a significant role in the rehabilitation of persons with disabilities. I am glad that the Government is partnering with civil society organisations.

There is much more to be done.

Creating accessible environment for persons with disabilities has been one of the priority areas for the Government since inception of Accessible India Campaign in

2015. Given the size of the existing infrastructure to be made accessible, I foresee that there is a need to develop collaborative efforts among all stakeholders for developing barrier free environment for the Persons with Disabilities, be it in the physical infrastructure or transportation or ICT ecosystem.

I urge the corporate and the private entities to take all steps possible to make their infrastructure accessible to persons with disabilities.

The Government is equally committed to enhance the mobility of persons with disabilities. In the recent past, the Government has laid greater thrust on distribution of aids and assistive devices to the persons with disabilities. I am happy to know that this programme has achieved substantial degree of visibility and created positive awareness across the country.

Further, in order to develop a common language and communication for hearing impaired in the country, the Government has established the Indian Sign Language Research and Training Centre. I am glad to know that the institute has already created a sign language dictionary of more than 6000 words and is working towards developing a standardized Indian Sign Language.

The Government is also in the process of implementing a Unique ID project to create a national database of all persons with disabilities in the country for taking Government benefits to every deserving person.

I am given to understand that recently the Government has taken initiative in establishing Centres for Disability Sports. Promoting sports among persons with disabilities is a welcome step and would certainly instil a sense of inclusion and confidence amongst the persons with disabilities. I hope the Centres will emerge as pioneering institutions in the field of sports for persons with disabilities in years to come in all regions of the country. Our sportspersons have constantly done country proud in Paralympics.

We need to involve persons with disabilities in social and cultural activities where they can have the freedom to participate as per their abilities. I am glad to know that with a view to recognize and promote the artistic skills of Divyangjan, a cultural event was held in Rashrapati Bhavan Cultural Centre in April and also in the Balayogi Auditorium, Parliament Library complex in July this year.

I would also like to stress that employment is the key to economic empowerment of persons with disabilities. I am glad that the Government is implementing a National Action Plan for Skill Development of Persons with Disabilities with a view to make them self-reliant. Vacancies have been reserved for them in Government establishments as well.

I am given to understand that the Government has approved establishment of the National Institute of Mental Health Rehabilitation in Madhya Pradesh. This institute will be one of the first of its kind in the continent for rehabilitation of persons with mental illness and will also promote capacity building in the area of mental health

rehabilitation. I hope the institute will be developed into a world class institute to serve for the rehabilitation of persons with mental illness.

Dear sisters and brothers,

To conclude, I would like to quote the words of Swami Vivekananda who said,

"Every Soul is Divine, within each of you there is the power to remove all wants and all miseries. Believe this, and that power will be manifested".

We must create, as a society, the right conditions for each citizen to live a fulfilling life. The innate power must be allowed to be manifest.

As I leave this thought with you, I once again congratulate all the National Award winners and convey them my best wishes for their success in life. I am confident that they will continue to lead and inspire to work for a better life and future for the Divyangjans in the country.

Thank you,

Jai Hind!"

VRRK/MS/MSY/RK

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