President's Secretariat

Inaugural address of the President of India, Shri Ram Nath Kovind at the Conference of Governors 2018

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1. A very warm welcome to all of you to Rashtrapati Bhavan and to the 49th Conference of Governors. I would especially like to welcome the Governor of Madhya Pradesh, Smt Anandiben Patel, the Governor of Odisha, Professor Ganeshi Lal, and the Governor of Mizoram, Shri K. Rajasekharan, who are participating in the Conference for the first time.

1. This Conference is held annually, generally towards the beginning of the year. However, the 2017 Conference could only be held in the month of October. Hence this year's Conference is taking place about seven months after the previous one. Such Conferences provide an opportunity for Governors to interact and have meaningful discussions with the Vice President, the Prime Minister, the Minister of Home Affairs, members of the Council of Ministers, the Vice Chairman of NITI Aayog and senior officials of the Government, all of whom are participating in the Conference. We will be discussing important issues and charting out the future course of action for these. In this context, the Conference of Governors holds a distinct significance.

1. As per the Constitution, the post of Governor has an exalted place in the scheme of governance. The Governor is a mentor and guide to the state government and an important link in the federal structure. The people of the state view the office of the Governor and the Raj Bhavan as a fount of ideals and values.

1. In the previous Conference, we had discussed issues related to "Infrastructure", "Public services", and "Higher Education in the States and Skill Development". Extremely useful and valuable suggestions were received from all of you.

1. As agreed to at the previous Conference, a Committee of Governors was constituted. The Committee submitted its report in January 2018. The report envisages the role of Governors as "Change Agents" in society. There will be a discussion on the actions taken on this report in session IV today.

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1. While drafting the agenda for this year's Conference, the central focus has been to sensitise all of you to the programmes being implemented for the benefit of those of our fellow citizens who have been left behind in our development journey, and to hold an in depth discussion on these programmes. One hundred and fifteen (115) Aspirational Districts, across various states, have committed themselves to speedy development. There will be a presentation and discussion on the schemes being implemented in these districts. Understanding this background will help you guide a spectrum of stakeholders in their efforts to work for the welfare of the poor, women, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, farmers and young people. There are approximately 100 million people in our country who belong to the Scheduled Tribes. A majority of this population lives in regions that are covered under the Fifth and Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. As Governors you can help in the shaping of a road map for the betterment of lives of our fellow citizens, who have not benefited as much as expected from our development journey.

1. India is blessed with the largest youth population in the world. As Governors, you are guardians of our youth – in the sense that you can inspire young people to absorb the right moral values and you can motivate them to both pursue modern education and remain sensitive to our Indian ethos.

1. As had been mentioned in the previous Conference of Governors, 69 per cent of all universities in our country come under the purview of state governments. About 94 per cent of students enrolled for higher education study in these universities. You are the Chancellors of most of these universities. In your capacity as Chancellors of state universities, it is for you to provide the necessary impetus and inspiration to these institutions and to enhance the level of scholarship. With the instruments of your office and with your rich experience in public life, you are ideally equipped for this responsibility. You can help ensure that admissions of students and appointments of teachers in state universities are completed well in time and in a transparent manner. You can also help ensure that examinations, declaration of results and convocations take place as scheduled. It is for you to inspire state universities to maintain this discipline and integrity. In a fast changing, globalised environment, it is equally essential to keep the academic curriculum updated so as to maintain the contemporary relevance of education. As Governors of your states, it is for you to engage the youth and motivate them to use their academic achievements for the welfare of society and of our country. We need to strive collectively for a better life for our coming generations.

1. The Government of India has decided to commemorate the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi over a 24-month period commencing October 2, 2018. A National Committee chaired by the President has been constituted for this purpose. The first meeting of the National Committee was held on May 2, 2018, in

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the Rashtrapati Bhavan complex. Many noteworthy suggestions were received during the meeting. This Conference has an entire session dedicated to discussing the commemoration of the 150th birth anniversary of the Father of the Nation. As we know, Gandhiji believed in constructive and actionable programmes that made a difference to the lives of ordinary people. There would be no better way to cherish his memory than to strive for genuine and meaningful social transformation. Gandhiji gave us an unfailing talisman. He said that to judge the efficacy of any action we contemplate, we should ask ourselves if it would be of help to the weakest, poorest and most disadvantaged person we know. We must keep this talisman in mind and I would welcome suggestions from all of you to put Gandhiji's ideals and values into practice.

1. I am confident that the presence and the contributions of the Vice President, and of the Prime Minister, the Minister of Home Affairs and their senior ministerial colleagues will make the deliberations of this Conference even more meaningful. All of you have rich experience in public life. I am confident that all of you will give valuable suggestions during this Conference. The deliberations will help us in our efforts to build a society marked by sensitivity, fraternity and inclusion.

1. With these words, Ladies and Gentlemen, I declare the Conference of Governors 2018 open. I request the Minister of Home Affairs to take forward the proceedings.

Thank you,

Jai Hind!

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