

ELDERLY PEOPLE ARE THE CONSCIOUS KEEPERS OF OUR SOCIETY AND IT IS EVERYBODY'S RESPONSIBILITY TO RESPECT THEM: VICE PRESIDENT

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Vice President's Secretariat

Elderly people are the conscious keepers of our society and it is everybody's responsibility to respect them: Vice President

Avoid the use of the word 'Old' and replace it with 'Senior';

Replace 'Old age Homes' with 'Homes for the Elderly';

Extend all affordable healthcare programs to the elderly;

Presents Vayoshreshtha Samman Awards 2018

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The Vice President of India, Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu has stressed on the need to respect and seek guidance of the elderly people. Calling them the conscious keepers of our society, he said that adequate steps must be taken to provide facilities to them. He was addressing the gathering after presenting Vayoshreshtha Samman Awards 2018 on the International Day of Elderly Persons, here today. The Union Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment, Shri Thaawar Chand Gehlot, the Ministers of State for Social Justice & Empowerment, Shri Ramdas Athawale, Shri Krishan Pal Gurjar, Shri Vijay Sampla and other dignitaries were present on the occasion.

The Vice President said that he would salute the wisdom and experience of the elders whose hard work and selfless sacrifices helped build this nation. I salute their struggle, their unique journeys and their success, he added.

The Vice President called on authorities and all the people working for the welfare of senior citizens to avoid the use of the word 'Old' and replace it with 'Senior'. He further said that there should be no 'Old age Homes' in India, there should only be 'Homes for the Elderly and Senior Citizens'. The word 'Old' invokes a prejudice and does not do justice to the energy and youth of our veterans, he added.

Expressing concern over the rising incidents of neglect of elders, the Vice President said that rapid proliferation of nuclear families coupled with urbanization of the society, inter-generational bonding has weakened. He stressed the need to safeguard and revive the joint family system

and said that elders enjoyed a place of reverence under the system. Elders are the custodians of righteousness, traditions, family honour, samskar and wisdom and it is the responsibility of the present generation or the children of the family to play a greater role in ensuring the welfare of elderly persons, he added.

The exorbitant cost of medical expenses is a burden, especially for elderly persons, said the Vice President as he suggested extending government healthcare schemes such as Ayushman Bharat to senior citizens. Quoting the 2011 Census data, he said that 8.6% of total population is above 60 years old and it is important to reach them and give them the facilities they need and the dignity they deserve. For this, the Vice President called for a special drive to include all the elderly people in affordable healthcare programmes. The processes of availing the benefits of such Government schemes should be easy and we cannot expect our elderly citizens to run around the office at that age, to avail the benefits, he added.

Following is the text of Vice President's address:

"I am honored to present the Vayoshreshtha Samman Awards 2018 on the International Day of Older Persons.

The United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution to observe 1st October, 1999 as the International Year of Older Persons and to promote the theme "A society for All Ages". Ever since 1st October every year is celebrated as International Day of Older Persons. It is indeed appropriate to envision a society which has compassion and respect for persons of all ages particularly the Elders. Though we take pride of being a Young country with youth constituting 65% of the population, the wisdom and experience of elders is always needed to mentor the young talent of the country.

According to the Census of 2011, about 8.6 per cent of the total population is of the age of 60+ years. Based on the rate of growth, the population of the elderly in India is projected to reach about 19 percent of the total population, by the year 2050. The number of elderly women is more as compared to the number of elderly men. 70% of the elderly population lives in villages where medical facilities and healthcare infrastructure and livelihood opportunities are minimal. Their health and financial security is a major concern as most of the youth migrate to cities in search of employment.

Sisters and Brothers,

We often hear of Generation Gap. The society changes intrinsically, continuously but gradually. This process continues for ages. It does not allow sudden disruptions between generations. The nature has destined that successive generations coexist so that social skills and wisdom are naturally transferred from one generation to the next one. Generation Gap is against the norm and scheme of society. Every society teaches its new generations to respect and revere elders. This finer link must be sustained from generation to generation.

Sisters and Brothers,

Every society has age old tradition of respecting and caring for the Elderly. Under our traditional Joint family system, they enjoyed a place of reverence. They were custodians of righteousness, traditions, family honour and samskar and wisdom. However, with rapid proliferation of nuclear families coupled with urbanization of the society, inter-generational bonding has weakened. The younger generation does not have the pleasure of enjoying the tender care, love, affection, patronage and guidance of the older generations. That is why we must promote and preserve the age old joint family system. India should revive its traditional family system and stand as a

model for other countries. Share and care is core of the Indian Philosophy.

Though with advancements in Medical Sciences and improved technology, the longevity of people has increased from the average level of 60s, to 70s, however, we have not been able to provide commensurate social, economic, physical and health security to our elderly people.

With advancing age the need for comprehensive health care increases as the incidence of acute and chronic disease conditions worsen. Chronic but non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, asthma, arthritis, etc. are more prevalent in the elderly and often require long term costly treatment. This causes a drain on the economic capacity of the elderly persons themselves in their twilight years and also on their families. By one estimate, every year some 5 crore people fall under the poverty line due to costly treatment. I will suggest that a survey must be done to discover how many of them are elderly people? And, if elderly citizens residing in rural areas are facing destitutions due to high cost of prolonged treatment. Such exorbitant cost of health care is essentially a social crisis that needs to be resolved.

It is in this context that the relevance of schemes like "Ayushman Bharat" must be appreciated. The scheme has come as a boon to elderly people. I will suggest that special drive should be launched to enroll elderly people specially from villages and rural areas. The Ministry of Social Justice along with Ministry of Health should launch special awareness drive about Ayushman Bharat among elderly people. I also think that Yoga and affordable AYUSH system of medicine can help in preventing and containing the old age related ailments and must be popularized particularly in rural and semi urban areas.

I am told that a healthcare scheme - National Programme for the Health Care of the Elderly, has been launched to address the various health related problems. Two National Centers of Ageing are also being set up at Chennai and New Delhi. In addition, Regional Geriatric Centers are also being established.

We must appreciate that age-related issues are chronic and require prolonged treatment and post – treatment rehabilitation. Geriatric care should be a separate medical, nursing and physiotherapy discipline. I will suggest that our Hospitals should have separate Geriatric Departments and Wards with specialists and paramedical staff trained in geriatric care.

I am told that the Government is assisting in setting up Old age homes, Day care Homes for Alzheimer's and dementia patients, physiotherapy clinics and Mobile Health Clinics for remote areas and villages. "Rashtriya Vayoshri Yojana" has been launched since 2017, for free distribution of physical aids and devices to senior citizens belonging to the BPL category.

I will suggest that quality of services provided under these Government schemes must be ensured and coverage should be expanded. The processes of availing the benefits of such Government schemes should be easy. We cannot expect our elderly citizens to run around the office at that age, to avail the benefits. Concerned agencies and Hospitals must use digital technology to facilitate people to avail these schemes. Government may hire volunteers, school students to help elderly people avail the benefit of schemes.

It is indeed a tragic irony that your income sources are restricted when you need them the most to meet your age related expenses like health care. I am happy to learn that to reduce the financial hardship of our elderly citizens in their old age, "Varishtha Pension Bima Yojana" a pension scheme for the elderly, is being implemented by L.I.C. of India since 2017. Under this Scheme, an assured income of 8 per cent per annum is given to the senior citizens for ten years, along with Life Insurance Cover. In addition another pension scheme for monthly pension to senior citizens belonging to BPL category is under implementation. Most States provide

additional contribution to the pension for the elderly. I will suggest that the possibility could be explored to increase the interest rate under "Varishtha Pension Bima Yojana" to 12% on a fixed maximum amount and the tenure should be extended, so that senior citizens could earn a decent monthly income for subsistence.

Sisters and Brothers,

What should have been a natural social norm of caring our elders and sharing their burden has to be enforced through legislation, "Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007". Parents will hate to evoke legal measures against their own children. But the very need for such a legislative measure indicates the crisis and marginalization our elders face in their families. I am told that the Act is being suitably amended to make more effective and beneficial. I also understand that the Government is finalizing a new National Policy for Senior Citizens.

Thank you for your patient hearing.

Jai Hind!"

AKT/BK/MS/RK

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