

**Hon'ble Members of the Legislative
Assembly,**

Vanakkam.

It is a great honour and privilege to deliver my first address in the Fifteenth Legislative Assembly after assumption of charge as the Governor of Tamil Nadu. I take this opportunity to extend my greetings for the New Year to all the members of this august House and the people of Tamil Nadu. May this year unfold new paths and novel opportunities for all of you to fulfill the aspirations of the people whom you represent!

2. This session commences on a solemn and sombre note in the aftermath of the sudden and sad demise of the

charismatic, dynamic and sagacious leader, the **late Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, J Jayalithaa**. A towering personality, she remained the most revered leader of Tamil Nadu for three decades, no less. Her tireless work and fearless battles to uphold the rights of the State and its people made her a peerless star in the galaxy of great leaders. Popular across the country, she earned laurels and accolades even beyond its borders. The late Chief Minister J Jayalithaa's stellar record in promoting socio-economic change in the State, particularly the welfare of women, children and the poor, will astound millions for years to come. After her sad demise, we inherit the legacy of her grand vision to make Tamil Nadu the ***numero uno*** State

in the country and it will be our mission to work tirelessly to realize her vision.

3. I greet and extend my good wishes to the Hon'ble Chief Minister Thiru O.Panneerselvam and the Council of Ministers, who have assumed Office to take the State forward in the path charted out by the late Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa. Focus on equity and inclusive development through pioneering welfare schemes, while strengthening infrastructure to accelerate economic growth, has been the bedrock of the late Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa's public policy. From this emerged the five State missions, which she unveiled to address the critical issues of **water resource management, housing for the poor, poverty reduction, skill development**

and public sanitation, and eleven special focus areas of development. The new Government will continue to progress in this path to keep up the high momentum of development in the State. I extend my sincere wishes to each one of you for achieving this noble goal.

4. I take this opportunity to commend the people of Tamil Nadu for maintaining peace and calm during the trying times in the aftermath of the sad demise of the late Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa, paying true and dignified tribute to her memory by displaying the greatest respect for the rule of law and maintaining public order, thereby setting an example to the entire country. I must also mention that the conduct of all public servants and the police

had been exemplary during the hour of grief and their commitment to duty has earned widespread appreciation.

5. The State has been unjustly denied its due share of central tax devolution by the Fourteenth Finance Commission, which had reduced the earlier inter-se share of Tamil Nadu by 19.04 per cent, the highest loss suffered by any State in the country. This reduction in the horizontal share implies that although the Fourteenth Finance Commission had increased the States' share in the divisible pool of Central Taxes from 32 per cent to 42 per cent, Tamil Nadu received only a meagre 2.98 per cent additionally, if normal growth of the Central Tax collection during the first year of the award period i.e. 2015-16, is taken into

consideration. In comparison, other States have benefited by at least 30 per cent. While the State has not been benefited by the additional fiscal space claimed to have been created by the award of the Fourteenth Finance Commission, the State's finances have further been strained due to the increase in State's share in Centrally Sponsored Schemes. **I hope that the Government of India, which places great emphasis on co-operative federalism, will consider the request of the State Government to treat Tamil Nadu as a special case by providing an annual Grant of Rs.2,000 crore during the award period in order to mitigate the impact of reduced devolution.**

6. I believe that the Government of India's decision of demonetization of the Specified Bank Notes (SBN) will bring a long term dividend to the economy, although its short-term negative impact, particularly on the informal sector, farmers and small traders may last longer than expected. The impact of demonetization has been particularly severe on the resources of the States as tax revenue collections have slowed down in the last few months. As a mechanism to tide over this crisis, the State has requested the Government of India to increase its share on Centrally Sponsored Schemes from 60 per cent to 90 per cent for the next two years. I hope that this request will also be considered positively.

7. This Government has been consistently raising various issues relating to the State's interest in implementing the Goods and Services Tax (GST). Apart from the concerns on the loss of revenue, Tamil Nadu has been raising several significant issues that have a bearing on the interest of the State by taking an active and constructive role in the deliberations of the GST Council. It is heartening to note that the members of the GST Council, including the Government of India, have appreciated the concerns of Tamil Nadu and have incorporated the changes suggested by the State in the proposed legislations. The guarantee of full compensation to the States for the losses occurring on account of implementation of GST for a period of five years; the adoption of a growth rate of

14 per cent per year over the base year 2015-16 for calculating the revenue of the State and determining compensation; the mutual empowerment of Central and State Governments to administer all the GST statutes are examples of the spirit of accommodation exhibited by the GST Council. In the same spirit, I request the Government of India to ensure that the present level of Central transfers after appropriate adjustment for normal growth will be maintained even after the implementation of GST.

8. Tamil Nadu has been repeatedly facing the impact of extreme natural calamities. After the State had recovered remarkably from the unprecedented floods during December 2015, it again

demonstrated its immense resilience in December 2016, when the 'Vardah' cyclone devastated Chennai City, Kancheepuram and Thiruvallur districts. Lakhs of trees were uprooted disrupting transport, electrical transmission and distribution, communication and other networks. Swiftly responding to this calamity, the State Government sanctioned Rs.585.45 crore to carry out immediate relief measures. The entire State machinery worked tirelessly and ensured return to normalcy in the shortest possible time by responding to the crisis efficiently and in an organized and co-ordinated manner. The Hon'ble Chief Minister submitted a Memorandum to the Government of India seeking assistance of Rs.1,972.89 crore for immediate restoration and relief works under the

National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF) and Rs.20,600.37 crore towards permanent restoration works. I urge the Government of India to consider the request of the State Government at the earliest.

9. Cyclone 'Vardah' uprooted and damaged a very large number of trees both on public and private lands in Chennai City and the adjoining districts. **The Government will launch a massive Greening Programme to replant trees in public lands and facilitate private individuals and institutions to plant trees. As tree planting and provision of green cover was a cause, close to the heart of the late Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu J Jayalalithaa, this massive tree planting initiative will be launched**

on 24th February, 2017 to coincide with the late Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu J Jayalalithaa's 69th birthday.

10. The 'Vardah' cyclone brought more wind than rains. The State is now witnessing a drought of a very severe nature with 62 per cent deficit in rainfall during the North East Monsoon. Long dry spells and water shortages have caused extensive crop failure affecting the livelihood of lakhs of farmers. The State is also facing severe shortage of drinking water and fodder for cattle. This is the worst drought that the State has faced in the last 140 years. The State Government has promptly responded by declaring the entire State as affected by '**severe drought**' and has announced a relief package for crop loss

compensation and other relief measures. **The State has presented a Memorandum and sought Rs.39,565 crore from the National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF). I sincerely hope that the Government of India will respond to the request expeditiously.**

11. Carrying forward the legacy of the late Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa, the State Government will continue to fight for the rights of Sri Lankan Tamils. Democratic decentralization through the 13th Amendment to the Constitution of Sri Lanka should be the spring board for the process of securing the right to self-determination for Sri Lankan Tamils. This Government urges the Government of India to take concerted efforts to bring to

book those in Sri Lanka who had perpetrated genocide and war crimes on innocent Tamils in Sri Lanka. The Government of India should take the initiative in this regard in the appropriate international fora. I also trust that the Union Government will take appropriate action to persuade the Sri Lankan Government to restore lands, confer economic rights and ensure equality and dignity to the Tamil minorities in Sri Lanka.

12. The Government of Tamil Nadu is committed to protecting the traditional fishing rights of our fishermen in the Palk Bay. Even though the Sri Lankan Navy continues to make unprovoked attacks on our fishermen while fishing in their traditional waters in the Palk Bay,

the State Government has been taking earnest steps to ensure that our fishermen eke out their livelihood peacefully. While thanking the Government of India for its efforts to get 51 fishermen released recently, I request the Government of India to pursue efforts to get the remaining fishermen in Sri Lankan custody released at the earliest. I also urge the Government of India to take strenuous efforts to secure the release of the fishing boats, which continue to be in the custody of Sri Lanka. I hope that the request of the late Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa to abrogate the 1974 agreement and retrieve Katchatheevu as a permanent remedy for restoring the traditional fishing rights of Indian fishermen is acted upon by the Government of India.

13. Jallikattu is an integral part of the ancient tradition of Tamil Nadu and is inextricably linked to rural and agrarian customs and has religious significance for the people of Tamil Nadu. Jallikattu also addresses the cause of conservation of native breeds. The actions of the former UPA Government at the Centre led to the banning of Jallikattu. The late Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa had relentlessly strived to ensure the conduct of Jallikattu through letters and Memoranda addressed to the Hon'ble Prime Minister requesting suitable amendments to the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960 and by taking up the matter before the Hon'ble Supreme Court. Accepting the request, the Government of India issued a Notification allowing Jallikattu on 7th January 2016, but this was also stayed

by the Hon'ble Supreme Court on 12th January, 2016. The State Government has continued the relentless efforts to overcome the legal impediments to the conduct of Jallikattu. The unprecedented and spontaneous outpouring of emotion and sentiment in a completely orderly and peaceful manner by lakhs of youth, supported by common people across the State, has received the solidarity and support of Tamil people across the globe to conduct Jallikattu and preserve Tamil cultural heritage. This mass movement has paved the way for lifting the ban on Jallikattu. Thus, after receiving an assurance from the Government of India that State Government's actions to ensure conduct of Jallikattu would be supported, the State Government has followed the Constitutional

route and issued an Ordinance amending the relevant provisions of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960 in so far as they relate to Tamil Nadu, thereby enabling the conduct of Jallikattu. I am very happy to note that as a result, Jallikattu has been conducted in Tamil Nadu. As a permanent measure to allow the conduct of Jallikattu, a Bill to replace the Ordinance will be placed before this august House immediately.

14. This Government is striving hard to fulfill the long pending demand of the people of Tamil Nadu to make Tamil language as one among the official languages of the Union Government. I urge the Government of India to consider this request and enable the use of Tamil language also in the Hon'ble

High Court of Madras. The Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly has unanimously passed a Resolution on 1-8-2016 to call upon the Government of India to move necessary Amendments to the Bill introduced in the Lok Sabha, so as to rename the High Court of Madras as the High Court of Tamil Nadu. I urge the Government of India to take further expeditious action on the basis of the Resolution of this august House.

15. It was only due to the resolute action taken by the late Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa, that the State Government was able to secure the legitimate rights of Tamil Nadu in various inter-state river water disputes. It was a historic achievement of this Government to raise the water level of the Mullai Periyar Dam to 142 feet initially.

Following the path laid down by the late Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa, this Government is committed to secure further raise of the water level to its Full Reservoir Level (FRL) of 152 feet and provide the much needed water to the southern parts of Tamil Nadu.

16. Due to the concerted efforts of the late Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa, this Government secured the legitimate rights of the State, first through the Notification of the Final Order of the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal by the Government of India and then through the order of the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India directing the Government of India to constitute the Cauvery Management Board and the Cauvery Water Regulation Committee. I take this

opportunity to urge the Government of India to constitute the Cauvery Management Board and the Cauvery Water Regulation Committee without any further delay for the effective implementation of the Final Order of the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal.

17. It was the late Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa's vision to make Tamil Nadu the **numero uno** State in the country by setting ambitious targets and aspirational goals through the 'Tamil Nadu Vision 2023' Document. This Document, which aims ultimately to improve the quality of life of the people, will continue to guide the Government in formulating various developmental programmes and implementing infrastructure projects. By constituting and operationalising the

Tamil Nadu Infrastructure Development Board (TNIDB) and the Tamil Nadu Infrastructure Fund Management Corporation Limited (TNIFMC), an institutional and financing mechanism for expediting the implementation of critical infrastructure projects has been established for the first time in the country. I expect that this institutional framework will continue to speed up the implementation of the infrastructure projects in the State.

18. The State Government lays great emphasis on the conservation and effective management of the limited water resources of the State. This Government will launch '**Kudimaramath**' scheme shortly for mobilizing public participation in the management of water resources and the

allocation for this scheme will be gradually stepped up over the years. The Government will soon implement the Phase-II of the 'Irrigated Agriculture Modernisation and Water-Bodies Restoration and Management' (IAMWARM) Project funded by the World Bank. The implementation of the Asian Development Bank funded 'Climate Change Adaptation Programme', which is aimed at reducing the impact of climate change in the Vennar sub-basin of the Cauvery Delta, is expected to preserve the fragile eco-system.

19. This Government gives utmost importance to the maintenance of law and order in the State, which is a prerequisite for socio-economic development. Tamil Nadu has been free of communal, extremist

and religious fundamentalist violence. This Government is keeping a close vigil on the activities of the Maoists and tackling it pro-actively with preventive and security measures in close co-ordination with other States. The police force is being continuously upgraded and strengthened with modern facilities and sophisticated equipment to effectively deal with crime. Impartial and timely action taken by this Government against anti-social elements has ensured public order. The State will continue to be a haven of peace and tranquility due to the effective maintenance of law and order.

20. This Government's path-breaking initiative of 'e-Sevai Centres' has given the people an effective and hassle free service delivery mechanism for a plethora of public

services. **Recognizing this effort, the Government of India has honoured the State with the 'Digital India' Award for exemplary e-Governance Initiatives in December, 2016.** This Government has also taken up a massive exercise of digitization of spatial maps and integrating them with computerized land records. I am happy to inform this august House that owing to such concerted efforts taken by the State Government, Tamil Nadu consistently ranks among the top three best performing States in e-delivery of citizen-centric services in the country.

21. The Government will shortly launch the 'Mission on Sustainable Dryland Agriculture', which is aimed at improving the production and productivity of millets, pulses

and oilseeds in dryland areas, at a total outlay of Rs.803 crore to be implemented over four years commencing from 2016-17. The State will continue to focus on farm mechanization and popularize water conservation technologies like micro-irrigation. To help farmers realize better prices for their produce and to improve market linkages, a new initiative to computerize and integrate the regulated and cooperative agricultural markets has been taken up. This step will eventually facilitate linkages with national commodity markets.

Due to various initiatives launched by this Government for agricultural development, the State's food grain production in 2015-16 has surpassed 100 lakh metric tonnes for the third consecutive year.

22. The late Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa's flagship programme of free distribution of milch cows, sheep and goats has significantly improved the livelihood of the poor by supplementing their income. The Government lays great emphasis on the expansion and strengthening of veterinary infrastructure, which is at the foundation of the development of the Animal Husbandry sector. This Government will also continue to strengthen the milk procurement and processing infrastructure of Aavin to further develop the dairy sector.

23. As the State is endowed with a long coastline, fishing is the primary occupation for a substantial coastal population in the State. Considering this, the Government is determined to improve

the infrastructure in this sector through the development of fishing harbours, fish landing centres and fish processing parks. This Government will continue to promote deep sea fishing with tuna longliners for achieving the long term goal of sustainable fishing along the coast.

24. This Government is committed to its policy of food security for all. The universal character of the Public Distribution System in Tamil Nadu has been widely appreciated as an effective tool to provide a food safety net to all without any exclusion. The Government of Tamil Nadu has been supplying rice under the Public Distribution System, free of cost since 1-6-2011. The Government of India had conveyed to the State Government in

October, 2016 that the monthly allocation of food grains to APL beneficiaries of Tamil Nadu will be made at Minimum Support Price, i.e., Rs.22.54 per kg as against Rs.8.30 per kg earlier, as the State had not implemented the National Food Security Act which came into force on 5-7-2013. Further, it was informed that the additional allocation of about 27,969 metric tonnes of rice per month will also not be made available. As a result, the State would have had to incur an additional expenditure of Rs.2,730.95 crore per year. Taking the above circumstances carefully into consideration, the Government decided to implement the National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013 in Tamil Nadu from 1st November, 2016. With a view to protect the Universal Public Distribution System

which the State has been adopting, in which rice is supplied to all rice card holders without any discrimination, it was decided to retain and continue the Universal Public Distribution System in Tamil Nadu while implementing the NFSA. The operations of the Public Distribution System are being computerized in order to make it more efficient and transparent. As part of this exercise, linking of ration cards with Aadhaar will be completed soon and smart family cards will be issued from 1st April 2017.

25. The late Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa's resolute and visionary effort has brought a massive transformation in the power sector and ensured that Tamil Nadu gets adequate supply of quality power. New power projects have been announced,

besides expediting the completion of ongoing power projects to fulfill the late Chief Minister J Jayalithaa's vow of adding 13,000 megawatt of thermal power. Massive initiatives have been taken to strengthen transmission and distribution infrastructure for augmenting power evacuation capacity. Tamil Nadu joined the Ujwal Discom Assurance Yojana (UDAY) on 9-1-2017, after the Government of India had agreed to the conditions which were put forth by the State Government on the directions of the late Chief Minister J Jayalithaa. The Government of India agreed to dispense with the condition of quarterly revision of tariffs and also agreed to authorize the State Government to float 15 year bonds with a five year moratorium. Accordingly, the Government of Tamil Nadu

will float bonds to take over the debt of Tamil Nadu Generation and Distribution Corporation Limited (TANGEDCO) to an extent of Rs.22,815 crore besides converting Rs.3,352 crore of Government loan as share capital. This decision will improve the financial stability of TANGEDCO. The path breaking welfare measures of the late Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa including 100 units of free power to all categories of domestic consumers, free power upto 200 units for handloom and upto 750 units for powerloom weavers, free power to the agriculture sector and hut connections will continue without any impediment. I am sure that the efforts taken by this Government will enable the State to maintain quality and uninterrupted power supply and to retain Tamil Nadu's

position as one of the most attractive destinations for new investments.

26. Major road infrastructure development works like the construction of bye-passes, ring roads and bridges are being taken up under the 'Comprehensive Road Infrastructure Development Programme (CRIDP)'. The initiative of the 'Performance Based Maintenance Contract (PBMC)' system to bring about a systemic improvement in the maintenance of roads has been a huge success and this will be further expanded in the coming years. The 'Tamil Nadu Road Sector Project-II' taken up with loan assistance from the World Bank, will substantially improve the road infrastructure in the State.

27. The Government is distributing 1.62 crore sarees and 1.62 crore dhoties to poor families under the 'Free Distribution of Sarees and Dhoties' scheme for Pongal festival 2017, thus also providing employment opportunities in the handloom and powerloom sectors in the State. The Government is taking concerted efforts to strengthen the Common Effluent Treatment Plants (CETPs) with Zero Liquid Discharge (ZLD) technology. Dyeing units in Namakkal, Salem, Erode and Karur districts will be rehabilitated with Government of India's assistance under the 'Integrated Processing Development Scheme'.

28. This Government continues its pioneering initiative of the habitation-centric 'Tamil Nadu Village Habitation Improvement'

(THAI) Scheme launched during 2011-12. Under the 'Tamil Nadu Rural Roads Improvement Scheme' launched during 2015-16, upgradation of 8,875 kms of rural roads had been taken up in these two years by dovetailing resources from various schemes. I am sure that the increased devolution from the Central and State Governments will augment the resources of rural local bodies and enable them to upgrade the rural infrastructure and basic amenities.

29. The objective of creating 'a functional toilet per house' through convergence of schemes is being vigorously pursued by the Government. The Village Poverty Reduction Committees (VPRCs) and Panchayat Level Federations (PLFs) have

also been involved in this movement. It is heartening to note that Tamil Nadu is the first State in the Country to engage the workers under the 'Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme' (MGNREGS) as 'Thooimai Kaavalars' for solid waste management.

30. This Government is determined to alleviate poverty and improve the standard of living of the people in the State by adopting the 'Pudhu Vaazhvu' model for all districts through the 'Tamil Nadu State Rural Livelihood Mission' (TNSRLM). Self Help Groups, VPRCs and PLFs are being provided with bank linkage for availing credit facilities to develop micro-enterprises. A similar approach is being followed in urban areas through the 'National Urban

Livelihood Mission' (NULM) and the 'Tamil Nadu Urban Livelihood Mission' (TNULM). Implementation of these programmes, in both urban and rural areas, in a comprehensive manner, is expected to eliminate poverty within a specified timeframe.

31. The State is facing tremendous challenges in continuously upgrading the urban infrastructure. The State's pioneering initiatives, the 'Integrated Urban Development Mission' (IUDM) and the 'Chennai Mega City Development Mission' (CMCDM), are being implemented to improve urban infrastructure and amenities by dovetailing funds from the devolution grants. The Government of India's 'Smart Cities' and 'Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and

Urban Transformation' (AMRUT) schemes are also being implemented to strengthen various infrastructure facilities like roads, drinking water, storm water drains, solid waste management and sewerage management in urban areas. I thank the Government of India for including the cities of Madurai, Salem, Thanjavur and Vellore under the Smart Cities Mission along with Chennai and Coimbatore. The World Bank funded 'Tamil Nadu Sustainable Urban Development Project' (TNSUDP) is expected to give a further boost to this sector.

32. I am glad to inform this House that the Fifth State Finance Commission has submitted its recommendations recently and an

Action Taken Report will be tabled before the Assembly in the next session.

33. The creation of slum-free cities and hut-free villages is the ultimate vision of this Government. Towards this, a Mission of Housing for the Poor was launched by this Government during 2016-17. The State Government has taken up construction of 1,35,343 houses in urban areas through Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board and 1,97,619 houses in rural areas during 2016-17. These works are progressing well and similar projects will be taken up in the coming years.

34. I am happy to note that substantial progress has been achieved in the implementation of Phase-I of the

Chennai Metro Rail project. Passenger services have commenced in the elevated stretches from Chinnamalai to Airport and from Alandur to St. Thomas Mount. Operations in the underground stretches are expected to commence shortly. The extension of the Phase-I of the Chennai Metro Rail from Washermenpet to Tiruvottriyur / Wimco Nagar is under progress, for which the foundation stone was laid by the late Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa. The Detailed Project Report for the implementation of Phase-II of the Chennai Metro Rail Project has been prepared and is under the examination of this Government.

35. This Government is determined to improve the ease of doing business in the State and will further improve the

single window clearance mechanism to facilitate the expeditious approval of private investments. The Government of Tamil Nadu successfully conducted the 'Global Investors Meet' in September, 2015. This historic event saw 98 Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) being signed with industries committing a total investment of Rs.2,42,160 crore over the next 3 to 7 years. Of these, as many as 62 projects with a committed investment of Rs.63,212 crore are in various stages of implementation. Seven projects, with an investment of Rs.3,636 crore generating employment for 9,775 persons, have already commenced production. It goes to the credit of the Government that due to its proactive approach, within a short period of just over one year, Rs.25,020 crore worth of

cumulative investment has already taken place, which shows the confidence reposed in the State by the investors. All the remaining projects are being closely followed up with the investors who are being provided single window facilitation by the Government for faster approvals. After the stupendous success of the first Global Investors Meet, the Government is preparing to host the next Global Investors Meet.

36. The State Government will continue to pursue with the Government of India the issue of defreezing the assets of Nokia in Sriperumbudur in order to facilitate its revival. I strongly urge the Government of India to support the efforts of the State Government for the revival of the Electronic Manufacturing Hub at

Sriperumbudur under the 'Make-in-India' programme.

37. The Industrial Policy of 2014 lays emphasis on the industrial development of southern Tamil Nadu, by extending additional incentives to potential investors in the region. With the establishment of a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV), viz. the Madurai-Thoothukudi Industrial Corridor Development Corporation, the stage is set for the development of industrial clusters in the southern districts with SIPCOT having identified lands for acquisition. This Government has requested the Government of India to extend the Chennai-Visakhapatnam Industrial Corridor to southern Tamil Nadu and also include the Madurai-Thoothukudi Industrial Corridor.

While trunk infrastructure creation will be taken up through the Asian Development Bank funded Chennai-Kanyakumari Industrial Corridor project, the State Government is actively working to bring large-scale industrial projects into the region, which will lead to a balanced growth of industries in the State. The Chennai-Ranipet and Ranipet-Hosur Industrial Corridors envisaged in the Tamil Nadu Vision 2023 document have been subsumed in the Tamil Nadu region of the Chennai-Bengaluru Industrial Corridor (CBIC) Project funded by Japan International Co-operation Agency (JICA). The preparatory work of the project for developing Ponneri as a vibrant industrial node under CBIC has been completed.

38. The start-up ecosystem will be further strengthened by motivating budding entrepreneurs under the 'New Entrepreneur-cum-Enterprise Development Scheme' (NEEDS). The State Government has proposed to take up four Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) cluster development projects under the Phase-II of the Tamil Nadu Investment Promotion Programme (TNIPP) funded by JICA. The policy of the Government to provide financial assistance for promotion of new industrial estates by private investors and industrial associations with the collaboration of the Tamil Nadu Small Industries Development Corporation Limited (SIDCO) will be continued.

39. With the objective of improving the employability of graduates, the Government has initiated various steps including the institutional strengthening of training facilities in collaboration with Industries and Industry Associations. As a pioneering initiative, State level training institutions under Public Private Partnership will be established with JICA assistance covering key sectors to train master trainers and impart higher level skill training. This will open up new opportunities to fulfill the skill requirements of sector specific investors.

40. This Government will continue to upgrade infrastructure in Primary Health Centres (PHCs), Taluk and District Hospitals to further improve public health delivery.

This Government's flagship scheme of the 'Chief Minister's Comprehensive Health Insurance Scheme' has made great strides in providing quality tertiary healthcare to poor and needy families. This scheme has been continued further, with expanded coverage. Landmark schemes such as Amma baby care kit, Amma Arokiya Thittam, Amma Magapperu Sanjeevi, Amma whole body checkup scheme, supply of sanitary napkins and breast milk bank launched by the State Government will be continued. I am happy to note that the Government of India has adjudged Tamil Nadu as the best State in the Country for the second consecutive year in the 'Cadaver Organ Transplantation Programme'. The Transplant Authority of Tamil Nadu (TRANSTAN) will be strengthened and organ transplant

programmes in Government Medical College Hospitals will be further improved.

41. With a vision to provide quality education, this Government is consistently improving the quality of physical infrastructure in schools. The Government has provided schools with requisite number of classrooms, science labs, libraries and toilets. The provision of laptop computers, special cash incentives for reducing drop-outs, complete kit of study materials like books, notebooks, school bags, four sets of uniform, foot wear, bus-passes and bicycles will be continued. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act is being implemented in the State in full spirit, so as to benefit children from the socio-economically disadvantaged families.

42. Tamil Nadu has achieved the highest Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in Higher Education amongst all States in the country. The State Government is striving hard to make higher education affordable and accessible to all students by strengthening the existing infrastructure. Financial assistance is being provided to eligible students to pursue higher education through reimbursement of tuition fees to first generation graduates. It is the vision of this Government to make Tamil Nadu the 'Knowledge Capital' and 'Innovation Hub' of the country. Opening of new colleges in needy places, commencing new courses and stepping up infrastructure to improve the quality of higher education is being given top priority.

43. Starting from 2005, the Government of Tamil Nadu has taken a number of steps to streamline the admission process to professional colleges including medical colleges, and has abolished entrance examinations for professional undergraduate courses in the State by enacting the Tamil Nadu Admission in Professional Educational Institutions Act, 2006. This measure is intended to protect the interests of students, belonging to rural areas and students from poor socio-economic background as they find it difficult to compete with urban elite students in Common Entrance Examinations. This Government is of the firm belief that the introduction of National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET) for medical admissions would be a direct infringement on the rights

of the State and would cause grave injustice to the students of Tamil Nadu, who are already covered by a fair and well functioning transparent admission process. This Government will take all necessary steps to continue its existing fair and transparent system of admission to medical and dental colleges in the State.

44. As a model welfare State, the Government is determined to provide social security to all vulnerable sections of the society like women, children, differently-abled, transgenders, senior citizens and destitutes. The Government will continue to provide assistance through the Marriage Assistance schemes, Social Security Pensions, Cradle Baby scheme and Integrated Special Homes for

Senior Citizens and Destitute Children. Effective implementation of the 'Integrated Child Development Services' (ICDS) scheme ensures the proper development of children, adolescent girls, pregnant women and nursing mothers by providing them nutritious food and supplements. This Government also takes due care in providing variety meals to all school going children through the 'Puratchi Thalaivar M.G.R. Nutritious Meal Programme'.

45. It is the endeavour of this Government to protect and care for the welfare of the socially disadvantaged sections of the society like the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Most Backward Classes, De-notified Communities, Backward Classes and Minorities. This Government

takes immense pride in extending the 'Post-Matric Scholarship Scheme' to Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe students studying in private self-financing colleges as well.

46. The Government will continue to extend economic development assistance for income generation activities to various disadvantaged sections through Tamil Nadu Adi-Dravidar Housing and Development Corporation (TAHDCO), Tamil Nadu Backward Classes Economic Development Corporation (TABCEDCO) and Tamil Nadu Minorities Economic Development Corporation (TAMCO). School and hostel infrastructure facilities for students belonging to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Backward Classes, Most Backward Classes,

De-notified Communities and Minorities are being continuously upgraded for providing healthy ambience that enables the children to study well.

47. I have summarized the various policies and programmes of this Government. These policies and programmes were designed to the last detail by the ever caring hand of the beloved late Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa. These pioneering programmes carry the imprint of her committed leadership, hardwork and toil in the service of the people. Following her foot steps, I am sure that you will lead the State on the path of prosperity while ensuring equity for the poor.

48. This august House has the enormous responsibility of constructively deliberating on various issues of vital importance to the State and setting the highest legislative standards in democracy. I wish you all success in your endeavours and I conclude my address with warm New Year greetings once again.

Nanri

Vanakkam

Jai Hind