

Hon'ble Members of the Legislative Assembly,

Vanakkam.

I feel greatly honoured for this opportunity given to me to inaugurate this session of the Fifteenth Legislative Assembly by delivering my maiden speech in this august House. At the outset, I extend my warm New Year and Pongal greetings to all of you and to the people of Tamil Nadu. I am certain that this New Year will usher in a period of sustained economic growth and well-being for the people of the State.

2. The Government of Tamil Nadu, under the leadership of the **Hon'ble Chief Minister Thiru Edappadi K. Palaniswami**, has steadfastly been

adopting the governance paradigm of inclusive socio-economic development and welfare for all. This Government is guided by the vision of the **late Chief Minister J Jayalithaa** and remains firmly on the path set by the visionary leader in its endeavour to create a true welfare State for the people of Tamil Nadu. I am confident that this Government will provide governance par excellence and will formulate policies and implement programmes for attaining economic prosperity and social equity.

3. The last year has been a momentous one for the nation. We witnessed the introduction of Goods and Services Tax (GST) on 1st July 2017. The earnest preparatory efforts taken

by the Union Government and the State Government made the transition to the GST regime fairly smooth. I compliment the State Government for achieving this smooth transition and for its commitment to this major tax regime change, even when faced with the risk of an uncertain effect on the State's revenue initially. This Government is thankful to the Government of India for insulating the State Government from the revenue reduction risk by providing an effective compensation mechanism and thereby helping the States to secure their fiscal position. I am convinced that this historic change will usher in a long term economic growth to the country and to the State of Tamil Nadu.

4. The Government of Tamil Nadu has always been a fiscally prudent State and has waded comfortably through turbulent waters when faced with economic slowdown. The State's fiscal position has been resilient and continues to be so, despite unexpected setbacks in revenues. Though there is a concern about increasing revenue deficit due to slow growth in revenue receipts, the State is firmly on the path of containing the fiscal deficit and Debt to GSDP ratio within the norms. Overcoming the present financial difficulties, the State Government has been able to implement the recommendations of the Seventh Pay Commission, honouring its continued commitment to the welfare of its employees and pensioners. This Government is also continuing its public

welfare programmes without any curtailment in allocations, thus fulfilling the aspirations of the people of Tamil Nadu.

5. The Government of India has recently constituted the Fifteenth Finance Commission to make recommendations on the devolution of tax resources and grants to the States. Tamil Nadu has unfortunately been treated unfairly by successive Finance Commissions, especially by the Fourteenth Finance Commission, which increased the overall devolution of taxes by the Government of India to the States from 32 percent to 42 percent but curtailed the inter-se share of Tamil Nadu in this divisible pool of resources from 4.969 percent to 4.023 percent. This has resulted in a loss of nearly Rs.6,000 crore to

the State annually. The Government of India has also reduced its financial assistance for many Centrally Sponsored Schemes, thus leaving it to the State Government to fill this gap from its own resources. As our State did not get the benefit of any additional devolution, it had to bear this additional burden from its own tax revenues. In this backdrop, this Government has high expectations that the Fifteenth Finance Commission, constituted under the chairmanship of Thiru N K Singh, will rectify the past injustice and meet the resource needs required for fulfilling the genuine aspirations of the people of Tamil Nadu by being fair and equitable to this State.

6. I appreciate the sincere and strenuous efforts taken by the Government

in co-ordination with the Central Government to save the lives of fishermen who were stranded in the mid-sea during the recent 'Ockhi' cyclone. Indeed, the timely and co-ordinated action of the Navy, Coast Guard and Air force with the State Government made the rescue operations effective. I also thank the Hon'ble Prime Minister for visiting Kanyakumari to reiterate the support and commitment of the Government of India to the rescue and rehabilitation of the victims of 'Ockhi' cyclone and for an on-account release of Rs.133 crore from the National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF). I urge the Central Government to expedite the submission of the report by the Central team, which has recently completed its field visits for assessing the damages and sanction the due release of Rs.401 crore

for temporary restoration and Rs.4,854 crore for permanent restoration towards damages caused by 'Ockhi' cyclone. The State Government compassionately provided financial assistance to the bereaved families, besides sanctioning input subsidy to the farmers whose crops were damaged, in addition to the support for the re-plantation of rubber and banana. This Government is committed to continuing the rescue operations till the last fisherman is rescued.

7. This Government is unwavering in its commitment to the goals and objectives set in the Tamil Nadu Vision 2023 Document, which is a proud legacy left by the late Chief Minister J Jayalithaa as a pointer to guide the Government. Tamil Nadu has been making large

investments in the social sector, especially in health, education, child care and social security. The outcome of this sustained strategy has been a healthier population with its youth equipped with employable skill sets. It has also enabled the aged and the other vulnerable sections of the population to achieve a greater sense of economic security. Hence, it is not surprising that the State continues to rank high in all Human Development Indicators.

8. The Government has constituted the 'State Balanced Growth Fund' (SBGF) to bring about a balanced economic development across all regions of the State. This is one of the many novel initiatives taken by this Government, under which 548 projects were approved at an estimated

project cost of Rs.348.71 crore covering 105 economically backward blocks in the State. The Government has also undertaken the 'Special Area Development Programme' (SADP) to implement specific projects in hilly regions aimed at livelihood promotion and infrastructure development. These two programmes have contributed immensely to the economic development of the backward areas of the State and helped in reducing the regional disparities within the State.

9. The Government has always been at the forefront in promoting the Tamil language and its reach across the world. I appreciate the laudable initiative taken by the Hon'ble Chief Minister to facilitate the establishment of a Tamil Chair in Harvard University, by committing a grant

of Rs.10 crore for promoting research in Tamil language and culture. The institution of the **Sindhanai Sirppi Singara Velar Award** by this Government is a befitting commemoration of the contribution made by him to Tamil literature and will surely encourage Tamil writers expounding scientific concepts, social equality and labour welfare.

10. This Government is guided by the profound wisdom and vision of the late Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa. Her courage, her noble deeds and her invaluable contributions to the development of the State of Tamil Nadu and the welfare of its people will remain etched in golden letters in the annals of contemporary history of Tamil Nadu. I am happy to inform this

august House that as a mark of tribute and reverence to this people's leader, the Government has sanctioned the construction of a grand memorial for her on the Marina beach and has also accorded approval to the conversion of 'Veda Nilayam', the residence of the late Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa at Poes Garden in Chennai into a memorial, befitting her stature.

11. This Government has been steadfastly supporting the cause of the Sri Lankan Tamils and has been vociferously calling upon the Government of India and the international community to prevail upon the Government of Sri Lanka to ensure that the Sri Lankan Tamils live their life with dignity, economic security and adequate political rights. This Government reiterates

its demand to bring the perpetrators of genocide and war crimes on innocent Tamils to justice.

12. The Government of Tamil Nadu has always held that maintenance of law and order is the *sine-qua-non* for economic development. The State Police force continues to be provided with modern equipment and necessary infrastructure. I must congratulate the Government and the people of Tamil Nadu for firmly keeping communal, extremist and religious fundamentalist forces at bay. The Tamil Nadu Police has been keeping a close vigil on anti-social and naxalite elements and has sternly been nipping them in the bud. The State Government will take all steps to sustain this exemplary record of

maintenance of public order and peace in the society.

13. This Government has always been unwavering in its commitment to securing the traditional fishing rights of our fishermen in the Palk Bay. The efforts taken by the Central Government have substantially reduced the incidents of unprovoked attacks by the Sri Lankan Navy on our fishermen. I urge the Government of India to impress upon the Sri Lankan Government to release the fishermen and fishing boats under their custody. In this regard, I thank the Central Government for supporting the State Government in its efforts to promote deep sea fishing by sanctioning Rs.200 crore for replacing the existing fishing vessels with tuna longliners.

This Government will continue to urge the Union Government to give effect to the firm stand of the late Chief Minister J Jayalithaa to abrogate the 1974 agreement and retrieve Katchatheevu from Sri Lanka as it will provide a permanent solution to restore the traditional fishing rights of the Indian fishermen.

14. The Government's e-Sevai centres have been providing the common public with easy and hassle free access to avail citizen centric services. More than 190 services are being offered and since inception, 4.53 crore transactions have been carried out through these e-Sevai centres. This Government has rolled out a visionary e-Governance policy which will enable the public to access all Government services

through a single State portal in the online mode. Starting with 300 services, all Government services will be delivered online in a span of five years. Under the land records modernization programme, land records and field measurement sketches are being digitized to enable online patta transfer process. This online patta transfer system has made the maintenance of land records completely fair and transparent and has increased the accessibility of such services to the common people.

15. Growth in agriculture and allied sector is essential for equitable distribution of benefits of overall economic development to the rural population. The Government of Tamil Nadu has adopted a multipronged approach to increase farm productivity and

augment farmers' income. Multitude of steps are being taken by this Government to increase agricultural productivity, which include promoting mechanization in farming by subsidizing agricultural implements and Micro Irrigation in a big way. The Government is also implementing the cluster based '**Mission on Sustainable Dry Land Agriculture**' that holistically addresses all issues relating to dry land farming. This has helped to increase the area under food crops including millets and pulses to 74.6 lakh acres during 2017-18. The Government is also implementing an innovative '**Collective Farming Scheme**' to enable small and marginal farmers to work together and enhance their bargaining power to enjoy the benefit of economies of scale in agricultural operations. I appreciate the initiative of the

Government to protect the interests of the coconut farmers by permitting extraction of 'Neera' from coconut trees. **As yet another initiative, this Government is also planning to launch 'Integrated Farming Scheme' for promoting mixed farming to increase farm productivity and farmers' income in the ensuing Budget.**

16. The Government is also implementing a project on 'Supply Chain Management of Fruits, Vegetables and other Perishables' in 10 districts with a financial outlay of Rs.398.75 crore. Under this scheme, an integrated supply chain infrastructure is being developed by aggregating the produce of farmers at 487 Collection Points, processing them at 29 Primary Processing Centres and selling

them in 34 Main Markets, thus rendering logistical support, cold storage and warehousing facilities. The initiative of the Government to upgrade and introduce e-trading in 30 Regulated Markets and 8 Agricultural Producers Co-operative Marketing Societies at an estimated cost of Rs.102.84 crore will facilitate modernization of our markets and their integration with the National Agricultural Markets.

17. Agricultural activity is subject to the vagaries of monsoon. Due to the sustained efforts of the Government, 15.36 lakh farmers were enrolled under the 'Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana' in the year 2016-17 to mitigate the weather risk. This stupendous effort has placed Tamil Nadu among the top States in the

implementation of this flagship scheme of the Government of India. Consequently, compensation was sanctioned to 9.28 lakh farmers in the last 'Rabi' season and an amount of Rs.2,478 crore was disbursed as compensation for the loss of paddy, pulses, millets and other crops. **In the coming year, this Government will further increase the coverage of farmers to broad-base the benefits of this scheme.**

18. Animal husbandry being an important sector to boost rural economy, this Government will continue to implement the flagship programme of free distribution of milch cows, sheep and goats to improve the livelihoods of the rural poor. The Government continues to strengthen veterinary infrastructure which forms the

foundation of the Animal Husbandry sector in the State.

19. The State Government is steadfast in securing the legitimate rights of Tamil Nadu in various inter-State river water disputes. It was due to the untiring and unrelenting efforts of the late Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa that the historic feat of raising the water level of the Mullai Periyar Dam to 142 feet could be achieved. This Government is committed to further raising the maximum water level of the dam to the Full Reservoir Level of 152 feet. The Government of Tamil Nadu continues to urge the Government of India to expedite the constitution of the Cauvery Management Board and the Cauvery Water Regulation Committee to fulfil the long-standing

legitimate demand of the State. I am glad that the Hon'ble Union Minister of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation has assured support to the interlinking of rivers scheme for diverting surplus water from Godavari river through Godavari-Krishna-Pennar-Palar-Cauvery link so as to realise 125 TMC feet of water at Grand Anicut across Cauvery. I am confident that this initiative will give a major stimulus to our effort in interlinking of peninsular rivers.

20. With the noble objective of conserving and effectively managing the limited water resources of the State, the Government has revived the practice of '**Kudimaramath**'. Indeed, the efforts taken by the Hon'ble Chief Minister personally in

implementing Kudimaramath and permitting farmers to use the silt from tank bed for agricultural purposes have helped us to store more water during the recent rains. The Government is committed to continuing this scheme with enhanced allocation in the coming years. The State is also implementing the 'Tamil Nadu Irrigated Agriculture Modernization Project' with the financial assistance of the World Bank to rehabilitate tanks and increase ground water recharge. The 'Climate Change Adaptation Programme', being implemented with the funding from the Asian Development Bank for mitigating the impact of climate change in the Vennar sub-basin of the Cauvery Delta, is expected to improve groundwater recharge.

21. The Government of Tamil Nadu has always been a model welfare State and its policy of Universal Public Distribution System has ensured an effective and functional food safety net. The State is committed to supplying rice free of cost and sugar, dal and palm oil at subsidized prices to all eligible card holders, thus shielding the poor from rising prices of these essential commodities. **Akin to last year, all the rice card holders are being provided with Pongal gift hampers consisting of one kilogram of raw rice, one kilogram of sugar and other items, this year also.** It is the endeavour of this Government to ensure a fair and transparent system that provides hassle free service delivery in the Public Distribution System and its efforts in this regard to distribute Aadhaar linked

smart cards have been well received by the general public. It is heartening to note that the Government has distributed smart cards to 1.88 crore families already, out of the 1.94 crore families enrolled under the Public Distribution System.

22. It was with unflinching resolve that the late Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa brought about a turnaround in the power situation and enabled the State to become power surplus today. This Government will tirelessly pursue the goal of adding 13,000 MW of thermal power to the State's generating capacity. Works for installing an additional capacity of 6,200 MW are underway and new projects for an additional capacity of 9,300 MW are in the pipeline. Tamil Nadu reigns as the forerunner among

the States in the production of renewable energy and contributes 18 percent of the total installed capacity of renewable energy in the country. Despite the difficult financial position faced by the State Government, it has taken over the debt of TANGEDCO to the tune of Rs.22,815 crore under the Government of India's UDAY scheme and this has improved the financial health of the power utility.

23. The State Government recognizes that high quality road infrastructure is essential to efficiently move goods and services across regions to promote faster economic development. Hence, the Government has been taking up major road infrastructure works under the 'Comprehensive Road Infrastructure

Development Programme'. The innovative model of 'Performance Based Maintenance Contract' (PBMC) system has helped in maintaining the critical network of roads with high quality. The second phase of the 'Tamil Nadu Road Sector Project', being implemented with loan assistance from the World Bank, is also contributing to the improvement of the road network. I am glad to note that the Government has decided to transfer 7,964 kilometre length of 2,596 Panchayat and Panchayat Union roads from rural local bodies to Highways for upgrading them to the standards of Other District Roads. In the first phase, Rs.608 crore has been sanctioned during 2017-18 to upgrade 1,436 kilometre of roads for which works are in progress.

24. Considering the importance of the upgradation of the East Coast Road as a four lane National Highway, the State Government has given its in-principle clearance to convert it into a National Highway. A proposal has been mooted for the four-laning of NH-45A of the East Coast Road in the first phase and upgradation of the remaining stretches from Nagapattinam to Kanyakumari in the next phase. The Hon'ble Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu has personally reiterated the importance of implementing this project to the Hon'ble Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways, Shipping and Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation. I am hopeful that the Government of India will take up this work for speedy implementation.

25. The State Government has been effectively addressing the twin challenges of poverty and unemployment in a systematic and holistic manner. The State has been organising Self Help Groups (SHGs), Village Poverty Reduction Committees (VPRCs) and Panchayat Level Federations (PLFs) on the 'Pudhu Vaazhvu' model in all the districts of Tamil Nadu, and is providing them with credit linkages to eradicate poverty. As the next step, the State Government will be systematically organizing micro-enterprises at the PLFs and federating them to create producer companies through the World Bank funded 'Tamil Nadu Rural Transformation Project' (TNRTP). The World Bank has recently approved \$100 million of loan for this project which aims to promote entrepreneurship and rural enterprises in

26 districts of the State. Similarly, the Government has taken up the activity of creating new SHGs in urban areas through the National Urban Livelihood Mission (NULM) and the Tamil Nadu Urban Livelihood Mission (TNULM).

26. The Tamil Nadu Skill Development Mission has been closely working with industries in the State to identify skill gaps and conduct training for improving the employability of our youth. The Government has already launched a scheme with hub and spoke model, centred at Anna University, to train educated youth with upgraded skills with the collaboration of Siemens Limited. The Government is in the process of creating apex level training centres with the loan assistance from

Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) to network field training institutions in the State in five identified sectors, namely, automobile and automobile components, tourism and hospitality, healthcare, logistics and manufacturing of capital goods. These apex level training institutions will be managed by respective industrial consortium and will impart training to master trainers, network with the field level training centres and impart higher level skill training to youth for their easy absorption into industries. I am confident that this approach will prepare the educated youth for immediate absorption into various industries and will also reduce the skill deficit faced by industries.

27. I compliment the Government of Tamil Nadu and the people of this State

for their active participation in the 'Swachh Bharat Mission', which was launched by the Hon'ble Prime Minister and its implementation is being pursued by him personally with a missionary zeal. During my tours in the State, I witnessed the commendable work done by the State Government in implementing this Mission. It is commendable that 16 districts in the State have achieved the open defecation free (ODF) status under the Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin). I am confident that the State of Tamil Nadu will be able to achieve even higher levels of accomplishment in realizing the national goals under the Swachh Bharat Mission.

28. The State Government is fully committed to continuously upgrading the

urban infrastructure to cater to the needs of the growing urban population in Tamil Nadu. I am happy to note that the Central Government's 'Smart Cities' and 'Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation' (AMRUT) schemes are being implemented with full fervour. The Government of India has approved 10 cities in Tamil Nadu under the 'Smart Cities' programme and 33 urban local bodies under the AMRUT scheme for the upgradation of urban infrastructure. I am glad to inform this august House that so far, the Government of India has released Rs.828 crore and Rs.951 crore for Smart Cities and AMRUT schemes respectively. The State is also implementing the World Bank funded 'Tamil Nadu Sustainable Urban Development Project (TNSUDP)' thus giving a further

impetus to urban infrastructure development in the State.

29. This Government is committed to creating slum-free cities and hut-free villages in the State. Towards achieving this objective, a Mission for housing for the poor has been launched to systematically bridge the gap between the demand and supply of both rural and urban housing in Tamil Nadu. The State is in the forefront in the country in constructing free houses for the rural poor under the 'Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY-Gramin)' and the 'Chief Minister's Solar Powered Green House Scheme'. Since the inception of PMAY (Urban) scheme, the Government of India has approved the construction of 3.84 lakh housing units at a total project cost of Rs.14,462 crore.

I thank the Central Government for releasing Rs.1,498 crore so far under this scheme.

30. The Government has already constituted a 'Shelter Fund' for raising funds to provide housing to the urban poor. Legislation will be brought in the current session of the Assembly to enable the levy of shelter charges. The Town and Country Planning Act, 1971 will also be suitably amended to provide statutory backing for the issue of 'Transferable Development Rights' (TDR) to appropriately compensate those who give up their land for urban development projects like road widening. A secondary market for TDRs will also be developed through an appropriate mechanism. Following the enactment of the 'Real Estate

(Regulation and Development) Act' (RERA) by the Parliament, the State Government has also notified the RERA Rules. This is expected to regulate the real estate sector effectively and thus protect the interests of the consumers.

31. The Chennai Metro Rail has emerged as a boon to the people of the Chennai metropolis and has been gaining immense popularity. It is expected that the remaining part of the underground sections of Phase-I of the Chennai Metro Rail Project will be operational in stages by the end of 2018. The Phase-I extension, covering a length of 9 kilometre from Washermenpet to Thiruvotriyur / Wimco Nagar, is also under implementation. Three more metro rail corridors covering a total distance of

107.5 kilometre under Phase-II of the Chennai Metro Rail Project at an estimate of Rs.79,962 crore have been approved and recommended by the State Government to the Government of India for obtaining external aid. I request the Central Government to accord early approval for Phase-II of the Chennai Metro Rail Project.

32. The State Government is committed to improving the ease of doing business in Tamil Nadu and as a first step towards honouring this commitment, the 'Tamil Nadu Business Facilitation Ordinance, 2017' has been promulgated on 28th October 2017 and the bill for enacting it will be introduced in the legislature in the current session. As yet another major structural reform initiative, the Hon'ble

Chief Minister has launched a web based Online Single Window Clearance Portal on 2nd November 2017 that enables investors to obtain the required clearances and renewals across 11 departments. The Business Facilitation Act, when enacted by this august House, will further strengthen the Single Window Clearance System by stipulating timelines for approval and providing for deemed approval for certain clearances. The Government has also constituted a High level Committee to monitor the disposal of the applications within specified timelines and to act as a grievance redressal forum for investors.

33. The Hon'ble members would recall that the first Global Investors Meet in Tamil Nadu was held in Chennai in

September 2015. It was a grand event in which 98 Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) were signed with investors, committing a total investment of Rs.2.42 lakh crore in the State across different sectors. I am happy to note that 61 projects that will generate 96,341 jobs and with a total investment of Rs.62,738 crore are presently under implementation. The Government is actively pursuing the remaining project proposals by providing facilitation services to the investors through the 'Tamil Nadu Industrial Guidance and Export Promotion Bureau' for obtaining statutory clearances.

34. As Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) provide large scale employment opportunities, this

Government accords high priority for promoting them. Special focus is on the twin goals of promoting entrepreneurship and skill building. The novel initiative of the 'New Entrepreneurship-cum-Enterprise Development Scheme' (NEEDS) has created a favourable climate for budding entrepreneurs to build start-up enterprises in the State. The Government has taken up the development of four MSME cluster development projects under the second phase of the JICA funded 'Tamil Nadu Investment Promotion Programme' (TNIPP) for establishing infrastructure parks for supporting and handholding MSME business. The policy of extending financial assistance to private investors and industrial associations, in collaboration with 'Tamil Nadu Small Industries Development

Corporation' (TANSIDCO), for promoting new industrial estates will continue.

35. Tamil Nadu has always been at the forefront in the country in providing quality health care and enabling people to lead a healthy life. The State has already achieved the Millennium Development Goals set by the United Nations and the national targets way before the other States, and is also poised to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals much ahead of the deadline of 2030. This has been made possible only due to the sustained proactive efforts taken by the State Government in strengthening the public health care system in the State. The 'Chief Minister's Comprehensive Health Insurance Scheme' (CMCHIS), a flagship programme of the

Government, has made great strides in providing timely and quality in-patient care to the poor and the needy families, thus insulating them from sudden financial shocks due to medical emergencies. 'Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy Maternity Benefit Scheme' has substantially improved the health status of the pregnant women and the new born. The other novel initiatives of the State Government, namely 'Menstrual Hygiene Programme', 'Amma Baby Care Kit' and 'Amma Magapperu Sanjeevi' will continue. I compliment the State of Tamil Nadu for being recognized as the best performing State in the country in implementing the Cadaver Transplant Programme and for having received the National Award for the best performance in

deceased organ transplantation for three years consecutively from 2015 to 2017.

36. Considering the views already put forth by this Government to safeguard the interests of our State, students and doctors, this Government requests the Government of India to bring in necessary amendments to the National Medical Commission Bill, which is likely to have a huge impact on the health sector.

37. In pursuance of its commitment to provide quality education to every child, the Government is continuously upgrading and strengthening the school infrastructure in the State. In order to make school education more affordable and to ensure hundred percent enrolment of students,

the Government has been implementing a slew of programmes for providing all the essential study materials like books, notebooks and laptops, four sets of uniform, school bags, footwear, bus passes and bicycles to students free of cost, in addition to providing special cash incentives to reduce the number of drop-outs. 'The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009' is being implemented earnestly to enable the children from socially and economically backward families to get quality education in private institutions as well. I appreciate that this Government responded positively to emerging challenges by upgrading and improving the curriculum in schools at all levels, besides swiftly arranging special coaching for students to equip them for effectively facing various

competitive examinations. I am confident that the institution of 'Puthumai Palli' and 'Kanavu Aasiriyar' awards will motivate innovation and improve the teaching quality, in Government schools.

38. The State Government has been taking concerted efforts to make higher education accessible and affordable to all sections of the people in the State. These efforts have borne fruit, resulting in Tamil Nadu emerging as the top most State in the country with regard to Gross Enrolment Ratio in higher education. For providing more opportunities to students, 268 new courses have been introduced in Government Arts and Science Colleges and 89 new courses have been introduced in University constituent colleges. In order to

improve the quality of higher education, the Government has been continuously upgrading the physical infrastructure in colleges. During this year, Rs.210 crore has been sanctioned by the State to upgrade the infrastructure in Government colleges. The financial assistance given by this Government towards reimbursing tuition fees to the first generation graduates has improved the access to higher education for the students belonging to the economically weaker families.

39. I appreciate the State for providing an effective social security net encompassing all the vulnerable sections of the society namely women, children, differently-abled, transgenders, senior citizens and the destitute. This Government

will continue to provide financial assistance through marriage assistance schemes and social security pension schemes, and implement the Cradle baby scheme and Integrated Special Homes for senior citizens and destitute children. **The 'Two wheeler scheme for women' will be launched shortly, for which the Government has decided to enhance the subsidy ceiling limit to Rs.25,000 as against Rs.20,000 announced earlier.** This Government will continue to provide nutritious variety meals to all school-going children through the 'Puratchi Thalaivar M.G.R. Nutritious Meal Programme' and ensure adequate nutrition for the healthy development of children, adolescent girls, pregnant women and nursing mothers through the implementation

of the 'Integrated Child Development Services' (ICDS) Scheme.

40. This Government continues to ensure the security and welfare of the socially disadvantaged sections of the society such as the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Most Backward Classes, De-notified Communities, Backward Classes and Minorities. With the objective of improving the economic well-being of these disadvantaged sections, the Government is providing economic development assistance for income generating activities through the 'Tamil Nadu Adi Dravidar Housing and Development Corporation' (TAHDCO), the 'Tamil Nadu Backward Classes Economic Development Corporation' (TABCEDCO) and the 'Tamil Nadu Minorities Economic

Development Corporation' (TAMCO). The Government has been running special schools and hostels for students belonging to these socially disadvantaged groups and has been constantly upgrading the physical infrastructure of such institutions. These efforts have enabled the State to maintain its status as a frontrunner in ensuring social justice and equity to all sections of the society.

41. In spite of the immense fiscal stress, keeping the welfare of the Government employees in mind, this Government has already implemented the Pay Revision on the basis of the recommendations of Pay Panel 2017 at an additional cost of Rs.14,719 crore per annum. Many representations are

being received from various quarters about the pay revision. This Government will constitute a committee to examine these representations.

42. The vision of the late Chief Minister J Jayalithaa was to make the State prosperous and free from poverty, and to ensure social and economic equality. This vision is the guiding principle of this Government headed by the Hon'ble Chief Minister Thiru Edappadi K. Palaniswami. To fulfil this objective, this Government reiterates its commitment to work tirelessly for the overall development of the State and the welfare of the people.

43. I have summarized the various policies and programmes of this

Government. Hon'ble Members, I am confident that this august House will constructively deliberate on the various issues of importance to the State and evolve a consensus so as to reinforce the faith of the people in democratic traditions. I conclude my address by once again extending my warm New Year and Pongal greetings to all the esteemed Members of this august House and the people of Tamil Nadu.

Nanri
Vanakkam
Jai Hind