

SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE AT THE CIVIC RECEPTION

Netaji Stadium, Port Blair, Andaman and Nicobar: 11-01-2014

- It is with great joy and happiness that I visit the Andaman and Nicobar Islands once again.
- Each visit is an opportunity to pay homage to our freedom fighters who in this hallowed territory underwent great hardship and suffering to secure our independence. Our National Memorial, the Cellular Jail bears testimony to the sacrifices made by them. It stands as a symbol of the burning patriotism of many freedom fighters who spent their youthful lives here in incarceration.
- This beautiful territory may be 1200 km from mainland India but it truly represents a 'mini India' - with settlers from various parts of the country as also our indigenous tribes. It exemplifies the principle of 'unity in diversity'. Its unique and cohesive multi-cultural, multi-linguistic society sets an example to the rest of the country.
- The immense beauty and splendour of these islands, its rich forest and marine wealth, coastal flora and fauna, along with beaches of extraordinary beauty are a natural marvel.

- Ptolemy, the 2nd Century Roman geographer is believed to have placed these islands in his map of the world, describing them as “islands of good fortune”.
- The maritime activities of Britain eclipsed this idyllic situation. The islands, surveyed by Lieutenant Archibald Blair two hundred years ago, went under the British in the shape of the first settlement at Port Cornwallis. Neither letting the people free to live their lives nor helping them to progress, the British chose to convert the islands into a penal colony.
- Patriots like Bareendra Nath Ghose, Veer Savarkar and Trailokya Maharaj, who had dared to challenge the might of the Empire were brought here and confined in the Cellular jail.
- Andaman and Nicobar Islands has an important place in the history of our struggle for freedom. Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose seized upon the opportunity provided by Japan’s success in these parts to free the Islands from the yoke of the British. Netaji arrived in the Andamans on 29 December 1943 to take over the Andaman and Nicobar Islands from the Japanese Navy. He stayed in the abandoned residence of the British Chief Commissioner on Ross Island. He hoisted the National Tricolor in the Gymkhana Grounds on 30

December 1943. He also visited the Cellular Jail. He flew back to Bangkok enroute to Rangoon on 1st January 1944.

- Netaji appointed Col. A.G. Loganadan, the Chief Commissioner of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Col. Loganadan along with four other INA officers arrived in Port Blair on 11 February 1944 and established the Azad Hind Government in the Andamans.
- The Andaman and Nicobar Islands are the home of some of our most precious tribal communities. These communities are equal partners in the nation's efforts at progress through modernization. Progress must come to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands but it must come with deference to the people, their traditions and the ecology. People working amongst the tribals must take up the task of development with a spirit of dedication as well as a spirit of understanding and sympathy.
- Living in such close proximity to nature makes these Islands and its people vulnerable to various kinds of natural disasters such as earthquakes, tsunami and cyclones. I visited Andaman and Nicobar Islands soon after the Tsunami of 2004 and witnessed the destruction and devastation that had occurred here. It is the resilience of the people of these

Islands that enabled with the support of the Government the successful completion of the mammoth task of reconstruction and rehabilitation.

- The Islands have since faced two cyclones, 'Phailin' and 'Lehar' over the last couple of months. The Administration with the co-operation of the people was able to effectively deal with these disasters.
- I am happy to know that the Andaman and Nicobar Administration successfully conducted recently a major Disaster Management Exercise across the islands. I am sure such exercises will enhance our disaster preparedness considerably.
- Andaman and Nicobar Islands lie at the important junction of South Asia and South East Asia. These islands are only a couple of hundred kilometres from South East Asia. The location of a dedicated tri-Service command highlights the strategic position of these islands from the view point of the defence of India.
- Further, around 30 percent of India's Exclusive Economic Zone and concomitant marine resources are around these Islands. These Islands are not only the maritime gateway to

the Bay of Bengal but also overlook major international sea routes.

- These islands have the potential to be a spring board for India's engagement with South East Asia and the Pacific region. They can be developed as a significant trading, shipping and tourist hub.
- The location of Andamans a thousand miles away from the mainland and the fact that they are spread over 750 kilometres in the Bay of Bengal has implications in terms of security, connectivity and supply of resources and materials. This in turn constrains economic growth and employment opportunities.
- I am aware of the steps being taken by the Administration to improve infrastructure and transport, such as, acquisition of new ships, expansion of air services and projects for telecommunication connectivity. The Government of India will provide every support necessary to the people and administration of Andaman and Nicobar in these efforts.
- Our goal has to be to promote sustainable and inclusive growth while being sensitive to the fragile eco system and concerns of our indigenous tribes. I am confident that all of you will be able to achieve this objective under the dynamic

leadership of your elected representatives and officials of the Administration.

- A special word to the extremely talented children and youth of Andaman and Nicobar Islands. You are our hope for the future. In a rapidly transforming world, you have tremendous potential and opportunity to be agents of change. Where there is a will, there is a way! With hard work, courage and adherence to principles, I am sure that you will be able to take the Islands and our motherland to greater heights.
- I compliment the people of Port Blair, the Port Blair Municipal Council and the Administration for their enchanting, clean and green town of Port Blair. I also thank all of you for your warm welcome. I am indeed touched by your affection.

Jai Hind!