

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB
MUKHERJEE AT THE CONCLUDING FUNCTION OF THE
CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS OF THE FORMER PRESIDENT OF
INDIA, DR. NEELAM SANJEEVA REDDY**

Ananthapuram, Andhra Pradesh: 23-12-2013

1. I am very happy to join you today at this concluding event of the centenary celebrations of former President of India, Dr. Neelam Sanjeeva Reddy. It is with the greatest respect that I pay homage to my illustrious predecessor and warmly recall his exceptional leadership.

2. Dr Reddy was a true son of the soil and a farmer till his very last breath. His birth took place in a farming community in Illuru in May 1913 of this district of Ananthapuramu, which is also the working place of one of India's most revered philosophers and former President Dr. Sarvapali Radhakrishnan.

3. Dr Reddy is a man with many records to his credit. He was the youngest President of India, serving from 1977 to 1982. He is the only person to have been Chief Minister, Speaker of the Lok Sabha, Union Minister and President. Dr Reddy was the first Chief Minister of united Andhra Pradesh and became Chief Minister twice. He was elected twice as Speaker of the Lok Sabha. He was elected Speaker the very year he entered the House. He was also the first person to resign from the party as soon as he was elected Speaker, setting thereby an important and admirable precedent.

4. As Speaker, Dr Reddy admitted for the first time, a No-Confidence Motion to be taken up for discussion on the same day as the President's address to a joint sitting of the Houses of Parliament. He believed that urgent matters should not be delayed by taking recourse to traditions and precedents. It was during his tenure as Speaker that for the first time in the history of the Lok Sabha, the House sentenced a person to imprisonment for committing contempt of the House by shouting slogans and throwing pamphlets on the floor of the House from the Visitors' Gallery. The establishment of the Committee on the Welfare of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes was another achievement of Dr Reddy's Speakership.

5. Dr. Reddy, at a very young age, was deeply stirred by the call of Mahatma Gandhiji to work for the independence of India. In his book, "Without Fear or Favour" which he wrote in 1989 - towards the end of his Presidential term , he has commented - and I quote, "whatever successes I have been able to make of my life, I owe to the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi who could make man out of dust. I was greatly inspired in my youth by a remark Jawaharlal Nehru had made, 'Success comes to those that dare and act...'. In fact this remark was my motto in life

6. Dr Reddy joined the freedom struggle at the age of sixteen following Mahatma Gandhi's visit to Anantapur in July 1929. At 18, he gave up his studies to become an active participant in the nationalist struggle. In 1938, at the age of 25 years, Dr Reddy was elected Secretary of the Andhra Pradesh Provincial Congress Committee and held that office for 10 years.

7. Dr Reddy was imprisoned many times between 1940 to 1945, including during the Quit India movement. He served time with stalwarts like T. Prakasam, S. Satyamurti, K. Kamaraj and V V Giri who also influenced his thinking and activities of the future.

8. Dr Reddy was elected to the Madras Legislative Assembly in 1946 and became the Secretary of the Madras Congress Legislature Party. He was also a Member of the Indian Constituent Assembly. From April 1949 till April 1951, he served as the Minister for Prohibition, Housing and Forests of the then Madras Province.

Distinguished Guests,

9. Dr. Reddy was the main architect of modern day Andhra Pradesh. As early as 1951, he was elected President of the Andhra Pradesh Congress Committee. Dr. Sanjeeva Reddy as Deputy Chief Minister then joined Chief Minister T. Prakasam in guiding the fortunes of Andhra in 1952. He took on his broad shoulders the burden of finding solutions to the problems of administration and integration that arose at the birth of this state. This experience enabled him provide effective leadership as the first Chief Minister of united Andhra Pradesh, following incorporation of Telengana into the state as part of Linguistic Reorganisation. Dr Reddy served as Chief Minister from November 1956 to January 1960 and again for a second time from March 1962 to February 1964, thus serving for a total of over 5 years.

10. Dr Reddy combined three different qualities - those of a good party leader, Administrator and parliamentarian. He devoted a major part of his life in Congress Organization and shifted seamlessly from Organisation to Government and vice versa. He had no hesitation in giving up his Chief Ministership in 1960 on being elected President of the Indian National Congress, following Mrs Indira Gandhi. He went on to be elected President of the Indian National Congress thrice consecutively at its Bangalore, Bhavnagar and Patna sessions from 1960 to 1962.

11. As Chief Minister, Dr Reddy applied himself with vigour to the development and modernisation of this State and the progress of its people. He is credited with giving shape to the plans for construction of the Nagarjuna Sagar, the Srisaïlam Project, the Sriram Sagar and the Vamsadhara projects which are, among the most important milestones in the development of this region. If today, Andhra Pradesh is hailed as the granary of South India, much credit is due to Dr. Sanjeeva Reddy

12. Dr. Neelam Sanjeeva Reddy was a role model in Government and politics. He was greatly admired for his dignity in word and deed as well as his iron will in taking decisions and implementing them. In 1964, he displayed high standards in public life by resigning as Chief Minister, following adverse remarks by the Supreme Court against the Government of Andhra Pradesh for not filing an affidavit in the Bus routes nationalisation case.

13. Dr Reddy's tenure as President was a period of unparalleled political turmoil and saw him swear in three governments led by Morarji Desai, Charan Singh and Indira Gandhi. Dr Reddy took historic decisions on a number of important issues. By virtue of his long years in public life and close association with leaders from all sections of opinion, Dr Reddy was able to be a steady hand at the wheel of state. His wisdom, friendliness and accessibility endeared him to people belonging to all walks of life. He lent distinction to the highest office of the land by his idealism and patriotism.

14. Dr Reddy had great compassion for the poor. He often voiced disquiet over the fact that minimum standards of nutrition, clothing, shelter, medical care and education were beyond the reach of many sections of the people of India and called for determined efforts to address these deficiencies. He was also deeply concerned about the weakening of traditional values that have enabled diverse Indians live together in peace for centuries.

15. Dr Reddy spoke about how important it was for Indians to work together to build independent India into a modern nation. In his broadcast on Independence Day in 1978, Dr Reddy said, "Despite perplexing diversities, our people retain a remarkable dynamism and spirit of adventure. Our resilience springs from our well-established traditions of patience and perseverance, tolerance and compassion..... and it is to this eternal and immortal India that we rededicate ourselves today".

16. Dr Reddy's message continues to be of relevance today as we confront the challenges that our society is facing. They remind

us of the important responsibility that we have as citizens of India. We must embrace the spirit of these guiding words as we pursue our individual goals. I hope the people of Ananthapuramu, the people of Andhra and the people of India will honour his memory by remaining true to the values that he stood for.

17. I consider it a personal privilege to be among you today and to join you in this Concluding Ceremony. I take this opportunity to extend to all of you my best wishes for your continued progress and prosperity.

Thank you, Jai Hind!