

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

I extend my New Year and Pongal greetings to all of you. It gives me immense pleasure to deliver the inaugural address for the year 2016 in this Fourteenth Legislative Assembly. It is indeed a privilege and a great honour to deliver such an address in this august House consecutively for the fifth time. Being the concluding session of the Fourteenth Legislative Assembly, this session assumes great significance with regard to recording the invaluable contribution made by the elected representatives of this august House through constructive deliberations and debate on vital issues that guided the State's development in the past five years.

2. Ever since this Government assumed charge under the charismatic and dynamic leadership of the **Hon'ble Chief Minister Selvi J Jayalithaa**, in May 2011, numerous inclusive socio-economic development programmes have been implemented following the principle of a welfare State as the bedrock of public policy. I am happy to place on record that such sustained efforts have earned the State the status of a model welfare State and a forerunner in conceptualizing and implementing many inclusive development and welfare programmes. The verdict of the recently concluded by-election to Dr.Radhakrishnan Nagar Assembly Constituency has proved once again, the immense faith reposed by the people of Tamil Nadu in the astute and sagacious

leadership of the Hon'ble Chief Minister by electing her with a historic and resounding mandate.

3. Tamil Nadu has been spending substantially on social sector programmes to promote social equality and to reduce economic disparities. Sustained investments in education, health, poverty reduction and social security programmes have contributed in achieving a higher level of Human Development Indicators by our State in the Country. Poverty and unemployment, the twin challenges of any developing economy, have been tackled systematically and comprehensively by this Government. Through well designed schemes and convergence, both rural and urban poverty have been addressed effectively. In order to capitalize on the demographic dividend and

to reduce unemployment, the State Skill Development Mission is funding various projects for skilling the unskilled youth and upgrading the skill level of the educated youth. In terms of both resources and design, the Centrally Sponsored Schemes targeting these issues are dovetailed to complement the State schemes through effective convergence.

4. The Hon'ble Members are aware that the extremely heavy, torrential rains in four spells over a short span of time, including the highest rainfall in a single day in the last 100 years, caused devastating floods and inundated large parts of Chennai and coastal Districts during the Northeast Monsoon. The floods caused extensive damage to standing crops, livestock, public infrastructure and private properties, besides

loss of human lives. Although the Government's advance precautionary measures and preparedness under the able leadership of the Hon'ble Chief Minister minimized the loss of human lives, this mammoth adversity has left a trail of devastation.

5. The State Government acted swiftly and co-ordination teams comprising Ministers and Senior Officials of the Government were deployed to each flood affected District. Massive rescue and relief operations were carried out on a war footing, in close co-ordination with the Central Government agencies and lakhs of people were evacuated from the inundated and low-lying areas. Several measures have been taken to provide relief to the affected people. The State Government had opened

over 7,244 relief camps and provided safe accommodation and food to over 23.51 lakh persons evacuated from the affected areas. Over 1.36 crore food packets were distributed in these areas. Free bus travel was made available for four days which greatly helped 1.54 crore passengers stranded after the floods in Chennai, Kancheepuram and Tiruvallur Districts. Assistance from Civil Society Organizations and individual donors was also co-ordinated to synchronize all the efforts in providing relief. Across the flood affected areas, 36,840 health camps were conducted and simultaneously, a massive cleaning campaign was also organised to clear the garbage accumulated in Chennai City and clean the City after the deluge. It is indeed a commendable achievement of the State

Health Department that even after a disaster of such a magnitude, there was no outbreak of any epidemic disease. The entire Government machinery worked day and night to ensure that these measures were implemented effectively.

6. Under the astute leadership of the Hon'ble Chief Minister, the State machinery brought back normalcy to the flood affected areas in a very short span of time. Special camps were also conducted to provide duplicate copies of documents, such as patta, educational certificates, ration card, gas connection card, Aadhaar card, voter identity card, bank pass-book and sale deed documents lost during the floods. Textbooks, notebooks and an additional set of uniforms were provided free of cost to the affected students. While wholeheartedly appreciating

the State Government machinery for their exemplary work in restoring normal life after the devastating deluge, I place on record my appreciation for the spontaneous response from the public, particularly youth and various institutions, who extended their help and exhibited solidarity, compassion and brotherhood.

7. The First Memorandum to the Government of India, detailing the devastation caused by the first spell of rainfall, estimating our requirements at 8,481 crore rupees, was submitted by this Government on 23rd November. A Central Team to assess the flood damage was sent promptly by the Government of India. I thank the Government of India for the timely release of 1,000 crore rupees from the National Disaster Response Fund on

3rd December, 2015, after the on the spot assessment by the Hon'ble Prime Minister. The Government of India has also declared the floods as a 'calamity of severe nature'. A supplementary Memorandum estimating the requirements for financial assistance of 17,432 crore rupees for providing relief as well as to undertake restoration works in the flood affected areas has also been presented. I urge the Government of India to immediately sanction the requested financial assistance to undertake restoration works without any delay. I take this opportunity to gratefully acknowledge the support received from various State Governments, organizations, industrialists and benevolent individuals who contributed generously to the Chief Minister's Public Relief Fund.

8. The State Government has announced and implemented a liberal relief package reaching out to all the affected families. Immediate repair of damaged public infrastructure such as roads, bridges, culverts, irrigation systems, buildings etc., has been taken up at a cost of 595.82 crore rupees. This Government provided relief of Rs.5,000 to all hut dwellers, irrespective of whether their huts were fully or partly damaged. Further, for all the affected families in inundated areas who lost their personal effects such as clothing and utensils, an assistance of Rs.5,000 has also been sanctioned. Thus, the hut dwellers affected by inundation and hut damage have been provided with a total financial assistance of Rs.10,000 by this Government. A commendable initiative of this Government

is that the relief has been disbursed directly through the bank accounts of the affected families. Thus, 273.10 crore rupees was granted to about 5 lakh affected families whose huts and houses were damaged and 1,274 crore rupees has been provided to about 25 lakh affected families whose dwellings were inundated. Further, 451.15 crore rupees was granted to 4,81,975 affected farmers as crop loss compensation covering 3.82 lakh hectares. Altogether, the State Government has released 2,640 crore rupees so far under flood relief. Further, the declaration of the State as flood affected has facilitated re-scheduling of crop loans and the allied sector loans including loans disbursed to MSME Sector.

9. One of the laudable achievements of this Government is the formulation and launching of the Vision 2023 Document, an ambitious and aspirational document, to enable the State to achieve a higher level of growth through planned development within a specified timeframe. In line with the Vision Document, institutional structures like the Tamil Nadu Infrastructure Development Board, statutory enablers like the Public Private Partnership Rules, and funding mechanisms like the Tamil Nadu Infrastructure Fund, Tamil Nadu Infrastructure Development Fund, and Project Preparation Fund are already in place. Of the 217 identified projects, implementation of 84 projects is rapidly progressing and the others are at various stages of preparation. Undoubtedly, such a

comprehensive and focused effort in institutionalizing the infrastructure financing by the State is being made for the first time ever in the Country.

10. While focusing on infrastructure, the Government has also constituted the 'State Balanced Growth Fund' (SBGF) to address the regional imbalances in socio-economic development. This scheme is being implemented in 105 backward blocks. So far, 445 projects have been approved at an outlay of 230 crore rupees to achieve these objectives. With this, the State could reach the unreached in far-flung hilly regions and backward regions and thereby reduce the gap in important socio-economic indicators.

11. Under this Government, the promotion of Tamil Language, Art and Culture has always been placed at the highest pedestal. For the first time, a separate University for Music and Fine Arts has been established by this Government. Several awards such as Thamizh Thai Award, Kabilar Award, U.Ve.Sa. Award, Kambar Award, G.U. Pope Award, Amma Literary Award were instituted for the outstanding literary contributions made by eminent scholars. **This Government declared Puratchi Kavignar Bharathidasan's birth anniversary as 'Tamil Poets Day' on 29th April of every year.** As a tribute to the sacrifice of our freedom fighters, this Government has constructed several memorials and erected many statues. It is commendable that this Government

instituted 'Dr.A.P.J.Abdul Kalam Award' to recognize the contributions of a person from Tamil Nadu in the fields of development of science, humanities and the welfare of students. His birth anniversary on October 15th has also been declared rightly as 'Youth Awakening Day'. In addition, 1.36 acres of land has been allocated for the construction of his memorial in Rameswaram.

12. The Tamil community spread across the world is legitimately outraged over the Sri Lankan Government's impunity in ignoring international sentiments and resolutions relating to reconciliation and accountability for the war crimes and genocide committed during the closing stages of the civil war in Sri Lanka.

To assuage it, let me draw attention to the earnest efforts of this Government in passing a resolution by this august House urging the Government of India to take necessary action to pass a resolution in the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) seeking International Enquiry into the war crimes and violations of the Geneva Convention by the then Sri Lankan Government. **The Government of India should also pursue with the current Government of Sri Lanka the issue of taking action against those who committed such crimes against Tamils in Sri Lanka and render justice.** I hope the Central Government will **take serious note of various resolutions passed by this Assembly and take appropriate action** to persuade the Sri Lankan Government to

restore their **lands to the affected Tamils, thus providing equal rights and an opportunity to live peacefully with dignity.**

13. The continuing arrests of fishermen from Tamil Nadu and seizure of their boats by the Sri Lankan Navy, while fishing in the traditional fishing waters of the Palk Strait, is reprehensible and condemnable. The reluctance of the Sri Lankan Government in releasing the apprehended fishing boats, even after the release of our fishermen, is causing endless agony amongst the fisher folk of Tamil Nadu. Therefore, it is our duty to find a lasting and permanent solution to this issue by retrieving Katchatheevu and restoring the traditional rights of our fishermen. Considering the sensitivity of this issue,

I hope the Central Government will work with the Sri Lankan Government to find an amicable solution to this problem at the earliest.

14. I appreciate the efforts taken by this Government to promote deep sea fishing as a long term strategy by incentivising the use of Tuna longliners. To reduce the fishing pressure in the Palk Strait and also to expand deep sea fishing capabilities to tap the untapped deep sea fishery resources, I urge the Government of India to sanction the comprehensive financial package of 1,520 crore rupees for deep sea fishing and associated infrastructure requested by this Government.

15. This Government has equipped the State Police Force with the latest

communication equipment, vehicles, modern arms and ammunition, additional manpower and supportive infrastructure like construction of own buildings for Police Stations, housing facilities for the Police Personnel, etc. Effective maintenance of law and order has turned Tamil Nadu into a haven of peace and tranquillity, on which socio-economic development of the State rests. The morale of the Police Force is at an all time high since it has been given a free hand to deal with crime effectively. Constant vigil, stern action and co-ordinated approach of the State Police Force have enabled the State to crack the whip on anti-social elements and eliminate extremism in all forms. This has been made possible only due to the grit and determination displayed

by the **Hon'ble Chief Minister, Selvi J Jayalithaa**. I am sure that the State Police Force will continue to excel by displaying its outstanding performance and instill confidence and a sense of security in the minds of the people.

16. The relentless efforts of the Hon'ble Chief Minister to secure the legitimate rights of the State in various inter-state river water disputes and her victories are well known to all of us. One such achievement is the historic verdict of the Hon'ble Supreme Court in May, 2014, permitting Tamil Nadu to increase the water level initially to 142 feet in Mullai Periyar Dam. It is the perseverance and the concerted efforts of the Hon'ble Chief Minister in securing the above verdict that has enabled the State to raise the

water level to 142 feet during the last two consecutive years in November, 2014 and December, 2015. The State has also initiated action to restore the water level to the full reservoir level of 152 feet.

17. The efforts of the Hon'ble Chief Minister to secure the legitimate rights of our State through the Notification of the Final Order of the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal by the Government of India, in the Gazette dated 19.2.2013, giving it the status of a decree of the Hon'ble Supreme Court, are exemplary. This Government urges the Central Government to constitute the Cauvery Management Board and the Cauvery Water Regulation Committee without any delay for the effective implementation of the Final Order of the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal. Recognising the importance of

interlinking of rivers, this Government once again reiterates its consistent appeal to the Central Government for expeditious implementation of the interlinking of the Peninsular Rivers i.e. the rivers from Mahanadhi-Godavari-Krishna-Pennar-Palar-Cauvery-Vaigai and then on to Gundar. This Government insists that the Pamba-Achankovil-Vaippar link for which a feasibility study has already been done by the National Water Development Agency (NWDA) may be expedited. All inter-state rivers should be nationalised on a priority basis so as to optimally utilise the water resources of the Country.

18. The Tamil Nadu Government's views on the implementation of Goods and Services Tax (GST) remain consistent. It has been reiterated time and again that before

the Constitutional Amendment Bill on GST is taken up, the Government of India should strive for a broad consensus on critical aspects like compensation period and methodology, revenue neutral rates, floor rates with bands, commodities to be excluded from GST, the IGST model and clarity on dual administrative control and ensure that the genuine apprehensions of the States regarding loss of fiscal autonomy and permanent revenue loss are allayed.

19. The unfair treatment meted out to Tamil Nadu in the 14th Finance Commission's recommendations, with a drastic cut in the horizontal share, has severely dented the State finances. In addition, the prolonged economic slowdown, the reduced realization of tax on petroleum products due to drastic fall in international

crude oil prices and the revised sharing pattern of Centrally Sponsored Schemes have also added to the financial burden of the State. Nevertheless, committed to the vision of our Hon'ble Chief Minister of achieving the Numero Uno status for Tamil Nadu in terms of development and economic prosperity, the State Government has been steadfast in implementing all the welfare schemes and development programmes.

20. With the motto of delivering various services at the doorsteps of the people, this Government, under the charismatic leadership of the Hon'ble Chief Minister, has taken up innovative schemes like 'AMMA THITTAM' (Assured Maximum Services to Marginal People in All Villages) and service delivery through e-Sevai Centres. It is only due to this

Government's efforts to computerize land records in a mission mode that the citizens of Chennai City can access computerized Patta online through e-Sevai Centres very shortly. The unique initiative of establishing the 'State Resident Data Hub' (SRDH), an Aadhaar enabled database of all citizens, aimed at effective service delivery and more efficient monitoring of schemes is commendable. I am confident that the steps initiated by this Government to rollout broadband internet services linking Village Panchayats will bring in a revolutionary change in the governance and public service delivery mechanism in the State.

21. This Government has taken various initiatives to improve the revenue administration by enhancing the interface between the department and the common

public. Keeping this in mind, this Government has created new Taluks and Sub-Divisions to improve the delivery of and accessibility to public services. Among the slew of initiatives intended to improve the delivery of services, the 'Fast Track Patta Transfer Scheme' and the 'Chief Minister's Uzhavar Pathukappu Thittam' (CMUPT) are noteworthy. Under the novel 'Fast Track Patta Transfer Scheme', over 59 lakh patta transfer orders have been issued since its inception.

22. This Government has given topmost priority to the holistic development of the Agriculture Sector through various path-breaking initiatives. This has resulted in record food grain production of more than 100 lakh Metric Tonnes thrice in the last four years, surpassing the previous best of

82.64 lakh Metric Tonnes recorded during the period from 2006-2007 to 2010-2011. The State has won the Krishi Karman Award twice from the Government of India for the highest food grain production and pulses production. In 2014-2015 also, the State has been selected for this award for achieving the highest production in coarse cereals. Further, the State has received the 'National e-Governance Gold Award' for 2014-2015, for Information Communication Technology (ICT) based extension services to enhance productivity and income of individual farm. It is heartening to note the significant achievement made in the System of Rice Intensification (SRI) adoption, crop diversification and technology adoption that resulted in 44 per cent increase in average productivity of paddy, 42 per cent in maize

and 45 per cent in pulses under the 'Irrigated Agriculture Modernisation and Water-Bodies Restoration and Management' (IAMWARM) project, for which the World Bank has placed their appreciation on record.

23. This Government has supplemented small and marginal farmers' income and enabled their wealth creation through the meticulously crafted flagship scheme of 'Free Distribution of Milch Cows and Sheep and Goats'. Veterinary infrastructure has been expanded and strengthened on a massive scale. The strong emphasis placed by this Government on the Dairy Sector has led to the upgradation of milk processing infrastructure in the State. The capacities of the various dairies under Aavin have been enhanced at a cost of 593 crore rupees. I appreciate the initiative

of this Government in setting up a new Dairy Plant in Perambalur benefiting backward districts like Perambalur and Ariyalur. Various schemes such as the 'Fodder Development Scheme' for green fodder cultivation and 'Poultry Development Scheme' in backward districts have given a boost to this sector.

24. In Tamil Nadu, over two crore families are benefited with rice at free of cost and dal, edible oil, wheat, sugar and kerosene at subsidised rates under the Universal Public Distribution System, ensuring food security to all. Despite high prices of pulses and edible oil, this Government continues to supply these commodities at highly subsidized rates for the benefit of the public. I appreciate the gesture of the Hon'ble Chief Minister in

distributing a 'Pongal Gift Hamper' consisting of one kilogram raw rice, one kilogram sugar, sugarcane and a cash gift of Rs.100/- to all the 1.91 crore rice cardholders free of cost for celebrating the Pongal festival.

25. Apart from supplying essential commodities at subsidized cost, selective market interventions made by the Government have facilitated supply of various essential commodities at cost price. Launching of Farm Fresh Consumer Outlets, Amma Marundhagams, Amma Unavagams, Amma Drinking Water, Amma Salt and Amma Cement Supply Scheme are landmark initiatives taken by this Government to serve the poor better, which have earned many accolades. The pioneering initiative of 'Amma Unavagam' envisioned by the Hon'ble Chief Minister is being considered as a model

worthy of emulation by other States. One hundred and six 'Amma Marundhagams' opened so far, have proved to be a boon to the poor and downtrodden. These initiatives have helped in insulating the low and middle income families of our State from the rising prices of essential commodities, prevalent all over the Country.

26. This Government faced an alarming power deficit situation when it assumed charge. It is only due to the concerted efforts of the Hon'ble Chief Minister that Tamil Nadu has now become a power surplus State by augmenting power supply through various initiatives such as completing long pending power projects and finalizing long term and medium term Power Purchase Agreements. It is heartening to note that this Government

has added 7,485 MW of additional capacity to the State grid. The path-breaking Solar Energy Policy is a testimony to the farsightedness of our Hon'ble Chief Minister. The Solar Energy Policy of 2012, announced by the Hon'ble Chief Minister resulted in Memoranda of Understanding for investment of 35,356 crore rupees for establishment of 5,345 MW of solar energy projects in the recently concluded Global Investors Meet (GIM). With such path-breaking initiatives, Tamil Nadu is well on its way to becoming the highest grid-connected solar power producer in the Country, in addition to already having the highest wind power capacity.

27. Roads are the lifeline of our economic activities. Improvement and strengthening of the road network always

gain prominence under the dynamic leadership of the Hon'ble Chief Minister. Decongestion of roads and smooth traffic flow have been ensured by developing by-passes, ring roads and expressways. Under the 'Comprehensive Road Infrastructure Development Programme', sanction has been accorded for an amount of 14,841 crore rupees in the last four and a half years. Another achievement in improving and strengthening of roads is the implementation of the World Bank assisted 'Tamil Nadu Road Sector Project-II', with an outlay of 5,171 crore rupees for a length of 1,169 km. As a step to further ensure the quality of road maintenance, a Performance Based Maintenance Contract system has been put in place in Pollachi, Krishnagiri, Ramanathapuram and Tiruvallur divisions.

28. The rural habitation-centric approach of the 'Tamil Nadu Village Habitation Improvement Scheme' (THAI) and energisation of houses with environment-friendly solar energy under the 'Chief Minister's Solar Powered Green House Scheme' have received overwhelming response. With the aim of providing a dignified life to the rural people, under the 'Chief Minister's Solar Powered Green House Scheme', three lakh houses have been taken up at an outlay of 5,940 crore rupees in the last five years. Under the THAI scheme, rural infrastructure development works focusing on water supply, sanitation and upgradation of roads have been taken up to improve basic amenities in villages. I am happy to inform this august House that in continuation of the 'Pudhu Vazhvu Project

Phase-I', which was launched by the Hon'ble Chief Minister in 2005 and is being implemented in 120 blocks, 'Pudhu Vazhvu Project Phase-II' will be launched shortly at an estimated cost of 900 crore rupees, extending the scheme coverage to 95 additional blocks. Further, I am glad to mention that IFAD (International Fund for Agricultural Development) supported activities of the 'Post Tsunami Sustainable Livelihood Programme' (PTSLP) being implemented in Kancheepuram, Tiruvallur, Villupuram, Cuddalore, Nagapattinam and Kanyakumari Districts will be extended to six more coastal Districts namely Thiruvarur, Pudukottai, Thanjavur, Ramanathapuram, Thoothukudi and Tirunelveli at an additional project cost of 320 crore rupees.

29. Tamil Nadu is one of the rapidly urbanising States in the Country. With a view to tackling the challenges posed by this rapid urbanisation, this State, under the dynamic leadership of the Hon'ble Chief Minister, has taken up various schemes like 'Chennai Mega City Development Mission' (CMCDM), 'Integrated Urban Development Mission' (IUDM) with an annual budgetary allocation of 500 crore rupees and 750 crore rupees respectively. Further, to strengthen urban infrastructure, this Government, with the financial assistance of the World Bank, has taken up the 'Tamil Nadu Sustainable Urban Development Project' (TNSUDP) with an outlay of 3,831 crore rupees which is being implemented from 2015-2016. I thank the Government of India for acceding to the request of the State Government for

considering 12 Cities under the 'Smart Cities Programme' and 32 Towns under the 'Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation' (AMRUT). I hope these schemes complement the efforts of this Government to strengthen the urban infrastructure.

30. In spite of Tamil Nadu being a water starved State, the strenuous efforts of this Government have succeeded in addressing the water shortage issue by augmentation of potable drinking water sources. Over the period of the last four and a half years, this Government has added a supply capacity of 468 MLD of drinking water, which is a remarkable accomplishment. Various Water Improvement schemes are under implementation in 18 Municipalities and

23 Town Panchayats at a cost of 579.77 crore rupees and 680 recharge structures have also been taken up for augmenting groundwater potential near drinking water sources. These efforts taken by the Government have mitigated the drinking water problem to a large extent in the State. This Government urges the Central Government to restore the funding level for the 'National Rural Drinking Water Programme' (NRDWP), as any reduction of the earlier allocation will severely affect the implementation of drinking water schemes.

31. This Government, with the aim of providing affordable housing to all, has taken up construction of 11,344 units of houses in Chennai and other Cities through the Tamil Nadu Housing Board (TNHB) and 45,473 units of tenements through the Tamil Nadu

Slum Clearance Board (TNSCB) so far. In the current financial year, construction of more than 12,500 Economically Weaker Section (EWS) housing units under the 'Housing For All' scheme have been taken up, in addition to construction of 20,000 Green Houses in Town Panchayats. I appreciate the commendable steps taken by the Hon'ble Chief Minister in rehabilitating the families, who were living on the banks of the Adyar, Cooum and Buckingham Canal by immediately allotting 10,000 tenements after the recent floods. I am confident that her efforts will ultimately culminate in creating a slum free Chennai City by providing affordable houses to every deserving family.

32. I am happy to note that the passenger services on the elevated section from Koyambedu to Alandur, for a stretch of

10.15 kilometres, of the Chennai Metro Rail Project has been inaugurated by the Hon'ble Chief Minister on 29.06.2015 and the passenger services on the remaining elevated and underground sections will commence shortly. I am glad to inform this august House that the Government of India has agreed to speed up the approval for the extension of Chennai Metro Rail from Washermenpet to Tiruvottriyur / Wimco Nagar. The preparatory works for Phase-II of the Chennai Metro Rail Project covering a total length of 88 kilometres along three corridors at an approximate cost of 44,000 crore rupees is being fast-tracked for JICA assistance. This will help the State to further strengthen the Metro Rail network in Chennai.

33. The persistent endeavours made by this Government to attract investments have achieved stupendous success. The 'Global Investors Meet' (GIM) held on 9th and 10th September 2015, was organized in a grand and befitting manner. The unprecedented investment of 2.42 lakh crore rupees committed during the GIM was more than double the investment targeted for the State's first ever 'Global Investors Meet' (GIM), thus resoundingly endorsing this Government's policies. I am pleased to inform the august House that the investment committed during GIM exceeds the cumulative investments attracted through all Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) signed by the Government of Tamil Nadu over the 20 year period from 1991 to 2011. Ninety eight MoUs were signed and

documents exchanged during this Meet. The enthusiastic response evinced by both domestic and foreign investors bears testimony to the industry-friendly investment climate prevailing in the State.

34. The highest emphasis has been laid by this Government to make the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) Sector highly vibrant and dynamic with its proactive policies. Tamil Nadu has over 12 lakh registered units with an estimated investment of 1,13,039 crore rupees providing employment to more than 77 lakh people, which is the highest in any State in India. The steps taken by this Government such as 'New Entrepreneur-cum-Enterprise Development Scheme' (NEEDS), marketing support, tariff subsidy, capital subsidy,

generator subsidy, have played a crucial role in providing employment opportunities.

35. Achieving the healthcare standards attained by the developed nations is one of the goals encapsulated in the Vision 2023 Document. Since May 2011, 13.27 lakh persons under the 'Chief Minister's Comprehensive Health Insurance Scheme' and 31.19 lakh pregnant women under the 'Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy Maternity Benefit Scheme', have been benefited. Besides strengthening the health infrastructure, many pioneering initiatives like the 'Amma Baby Care Kit', 'Amma Magaperu Sanjeevi', setting up of separate breast milk feeding rooms for lactating mothers in the bus terminals, Mother's milk bank, etc., have contributed immensely to the quality of healthcare services in maternal and childcare

sector. I am glad to inform this august House that Tamil Nadu has been ranked second lowest in Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) and third lowest in Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) among the major States in the Country.

36. The priority accorded by this Government to School Education can be witnessed from the highest ever budgetary allocation to the School Education Department. The cherished vision of the Hon'ble Chief Minister to impart quality education is echoed in providing laptop computers, special cash incentives to reduce dropouts at the secondary level, free textbooks, notebooks, four sets of uniform, footwear, school bags, bus passes, bicycles, transport facilities, etc., at a total cost of 12,475 crore rupees in the last five years. Significant progress has also been made by

reducing the Pupil-Teacher Ratio in the primary and upper primary level from 29.18 to 25.11 and from 35.20 to 21.94 respectively. The initiatives implemented by the State such as increasing access to education, improving the quality of education and gap funding for construction of civil works have resulted in the Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) rising to 94.71 per cent at the secondary school level, which is the highest in the Country. The Government of India has lauded the State of Tamil Nadu for being in the forefront in the delivery of educational services.

37. This Government is relentlessly working towards enhancing the quality of higher education with a special focus on affordability and accessibility to pursue higher studies by all without any

impediment. The State Government has started 39 Arts and Science Colleges, 11 Polytechnic Colleges and 4 Engineering Colleges since May 2011, especially for the benefit of students from rural and economically backward regions. A major thrust has been given to legal education by the establishment of a National Law School in Srirangam and Dr. Ambedkar Law University campus at Perungudi. Reimbursement of tuition fees to First Generation Graduates has benefited 2,84,609 students from educationally backward families by enabling them to pursue higher studies. These initiatives acted as a driving force in achieving a Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of 44.8 per cent as against the National average of 23.6 per cent. One of the spectacular

decisions of this Government was the takeover of Annamalai University in the interest of the students who are mostly from the disadvantaged sections of society. This Government has provided 476.64 crore rupees so far to this university as financial assistance after its takeover.

38. This Government has striven successfully with an indomitable spirit for the upliftment of vulnerable sections of society like women, children, transgenders, senior citizens and destitutes. It has enhanced the assistance under social security pensions to eligible individuals from Rs.500 per month to Rs.1,000 per month. The 'Puratchi Thalaivar M.G.R. Nutritious Meal Programme' and the 'Integrated Child Development Services' (ICDS) Scheme have improved the nutritional status of the children significantly.

The plethora of schemes implemented for the welfare of vulnerable sections such as gold for Thirumangalyam under Marriage Assistance Schemes, Cradle Baby Scheme, Social Security Pension for the transgenders, Integrated Complex of Special Homes for senior citizens and destitute children have ensured a strong social security net in the State.

39. The welfare of socially disadvantaged sections of Society such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Backward Classes, Most Backward Classes, Denotified Communities and Minorities scaled great heights under this Government. Various income generation activities being implemented for the welfare of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, like self employment programme for youth, Economic

Development Programme, Revolving Fund and economic assistance to Self Help Groups have empowered these communities. A noteworthy achievement of this Government is extension of Post-Matric Scholarship to students belonging to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes studying in private self-financing colleges, thereby enabling them to pursue higher studies without any financial difficulty.

40. I have briefly outlined the various policies and programmes of this Government. The State has marched forward with unparalleled accomplishments in all the sectors and will continue to excel in the future as well. I am confident that the innovative initiatives undertaken by this Government under the guidance and ingenuity of the Hon'ble Chief Minister will

enable the State to achieve the Numero Uno status in the Country.

41. I am sure that this august House will debate and deliberate on various issues, setting the highest benchmark, to fulfill the aspirations of the people. I conclude my address with warm New Year greetings once again.

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Vanakkam

Jai Hind