

**Address of the Hon'ble President of India Smt Pratibha
Devisingh Patil at the Diamond Jubilee Celebrations of the
Election Commission of India at 1100 hours on 25th January
2010 at Vigyan Bhavan, New Delhi.**

January 25, 2010

New Delhi

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very happy to be here on the occasion of the 60th Anniversary of the Election Commission of India, just a day before when we will be celebrating our Republic Day. Today's gathering, in which a wide spectrum of our political leadership is participating, affirms our deep faith in democracy. I understand that representatives of electoral bodies of other countries are also here. I warmly welcome them to our country.

The Election Commission has been a part of the journey of our Republic since its very inception. It has been working with great responsibility from election to election and contributing to taking the nation forward step by step, from one destination to another, from strength to strength and bringing stability to our democratic system. We can be justifiably proud that free and fair elections have been held with regularity in our country in the last six decades. India and democracy have become intertwined concepts and it is hard to imagine one without the other. Democracy, the very essence of our Constitution, has become our nation's identity.

Framed by men and women of remarkable intelligence, foresight and values, our Constitution bears a profound imprint of the high ideals of our freedom struggle. In choosing democracy and by elaborating in detail the Fundamental Rights, the framers of our Constitution deeply embedded in our national ethos, the importance of the dignity of every individual. A natural extension of this basic approach was the inclusion of universal adult franchise in our Constitution, that gave from the very beginning, the right to vote to every citizen of India - man or woman, rich or poor, no matter to which caste or creed or religion he or she belonged - they were all brought together on one platform. The age-old inequalities were done away with and political equality was established throughout the length and breadth of the country. This was an enlightened vision, particularly if we recall that in many countries different groups, especially women, had to struggle to get their voting rights.

Our Constitution also set up independent and neutral institutions to ensure the continued existence of a democratic framework in the country. The Election Commission of India is one such very important constitutional body created under Article 324 of our Constitution. It has been entrusted with a range of responsibilities for the conduct of elections in the country. Members of the State Legislative Assemblies, Members of Parliament, the Vice-President and I myself, have come through an election process which has been conducted by the Commission. It is important that the independence of the Election Commission is upheld at all times.

Elections are the foundation stone of any democracy. The conduct of free, fair and impartial elections depends much upon the performance of the three stakeholders. They are - independent and impartial electoral machinery; political parties and candidates; and the electorate. All of them must act responsibly. The Indian election process has the Model Code of Conduct, that lays down the norms of behaviour and actions which, parties and contesting candidates shall adhere to, at the time of elections. As it should, the Commission has been making every effort to create a level playing field between various candidates and has earned the reputation of strictly and impartially monitoring activities of candidates in constituencies through its Election Observers. The Commission has always been willing to use technology for modernization and for the better conduct of elections. In this context, over the years, several measures have been taken such as - computerization of electoral rolls and Photo Identity Cards for voters.

Elections are not a ritual, but a pathway on which the people move with enthusiasm, expressing their aspirations, hopes and desire, as they take forward this great nation to peace and prosperity. With the size of our electorate increasing from 176 million in the first General Elections in the country in 1951-52, to 716 million in the 15th General Elections held last year, the task of the Election Commission has increased manifold. Today, our electorate is almost equal to the combined population of the European Union and of the United States.

To organize elections for such a large voting population and in such a vast and difficult geographical area requires exceptional management and co-ordination. The General Elections conducted in May last year meant the setting up of 8 lakh polling booths and the involvement of close to 5 million polling staff. So meticulous were the arrangements, that a polling booth was set-up even where there was only one voter. Another polling booth was established at a height of

15,300 feet. The election process, in a country of more than one billion people, was followed, the world over, with great interest and admiration. Thus, not only, has the Election Commission helped strengthen democracy at home, but also helped to enhance the prestige of India's institutional mechanisms. It is for these reasons that the Election Commission of India has been called upon often, to share its experiences about the conduct of elections with other countries.

India has impressive democratic credentials, but yet has the challenge of becoming a "role model" for other countries. This requires that we should be aware of the impediments, the lacunae and malpractices in the electoral process. These would have to be removed with determination, to make our democracy cleaner, healthier and stronger.

As we carry on with our work, we should not forget that we swear by the Constitution, and therefore, we must adhere to its values, spirit and principles. Democracy adorns our Constitution. We have to see that the power of voting vested in the people makes them powerful enough to change their own destiny through democracy and therefore, the importance of making democracy fully participatory. There have been constant attempts and I am confident that these will continue to be made, to increasingly involve people in governance. Through the Panchayati Raj Institutions and Local Urban Bodies, we have sought to deepen the reach of democracy. Their role and responsibility for executing programmes and schemes, particularly social and welfare schemes must increase. I am glad that the Election Commission has chosen the theme, "Greater participation for a stronger democracy", for its Diamond Jubilee Year. I hope that discussions under the rubric of this theme would be fruitful.

In the end, I once again extend my felicitations to the Election Commission of India, for their achievements in the 60 years of their existence. I am confident that the electoral process and democracy in India will continue to be strong and vibrant.

Thank you.

Jai Hind.

**Address of the Hon'ble Vice President of India Shri M. Hamid
Ansari at the Diamond Jubilee Celebrations of the Election
Commission of India at 1100 hours on 25th January 2010 at
Vigyan Bhavan, New Delhi.**

January, 25, 2010
New Delhi

This is a momentous occasion in the life of the Republic and I deem it a privilege to be participating in it.

The Election Commission of India, tasked by the Constitution to undertake a sacred responsibility, has discharged it fully.

In 1950 it was seen as a unique democratic experiment, an act of faith in the judgment of our citizens; today, the world marvels at the scale of its endeavours, their efficacy and comprehensiveness.

A celebration is a festive occasion. In the affairs of a nation, it is also a time for introspection. Six decades on, a fair verdict would be that the glass is neither empty nor full but well above the half way mark.

We have established and sustained procedural democracy. And yet, Dr. Ambedkar's foreboding about the contradiction between political *equality* and social and economic *inequality* remains valid. The realisation of "one person one vote and one vote one value" continues to be elusive.

To fulfill its mandate the Election Commission has been adapting itself in a remarkable fashion to changes in society, polity and technology. Three challenges, however, remain:

First, while we have traversed a long distance in providing a constitutional basis for local government, real empowerment and participative governance at the third tier of government is still a work-in-progress. It is to be hoped, as recommended by the Second Administrative Reforms Commission, that the electoral process at the local self government level would benefit from coordination and sharing of experiences and resources with the Election Commission of India.

Second, despite stringent efforts, unaccounted election expenses constitute the major expenditure of political parties and their

candidates. These relate to the distribution of freebies, liquor and cash during elections, the phenomenon of surrogate advertisements, and the extensive media-related malpractice of “paid news” and “coverage packages.” Each of these is a blot on the democratic process and on the objective of free and fair elections. Corrective action by the Election Commission and our political parties is imperative.

Third, the Election Commission has insisted upon and enforced procedural inner party democracy in recognized political parties. The challenge for the political parties now is to bring about substantive organizational democracy.

Ladies and Gentlemen

It was said in the Constituent Assembly of India that democracy was only a top dressing on an Indian soil that was essentially undemocratic. The Election Commission deserves the nation’s appreciation and gratitude for making our soil more fertile for the seed of democracy.

I thank Shri Navin Chawla and the Election Commissioners for inviting me today. I wish the Election Commission all success in its endeavours.

PM's Inaugural address at the Diamond Jubilee Celebrations of the Election Commission of India

January 25, 2010

"I am very happy to participate in this inaugural function of the Diamond Jubilee Celebrations of the Election Commission of India. I join all present here in felicitating the Commission on this historic occasion.

The Election Commission of India is one of the pillars of Indian democracy. In the past 60 years, it has acquitted itself exceptionally well in the onerous task of conducting elections to our Parliament and to the State legislatures.

The insistence on universal adult franchise was a tremendous act of faith on the part of the founding fathers of our Republic. To many it looked totally impracticable in an under-developed country of our size, with low levels of literacy and divisions of caste and creed. The Election Commission was given the task of converting this aspiration into a reality in which every adult Indian, irrespective of caste, creed, gender, income or location would get an opportunity to cast his or her vote. This was undoubtedly a gigantic task, right from enumerating voters to locating polling booths at easily accessible places and ensuring secrecy and security of the ballot paper. The sheer number of voters and the logistical challenges on account of distances and accessibility were truly huge. But the Commission rose to the challenge. It goes to the Commission's credit that despite these enormous difficulties the whole world perceives elections in India as being fair and free.

The Election Commission has also been quick in keeping itself abreast of technological changes and in introducing improvements in the electoral process. Electoral rolls are not printed any more; they are computerized. A large proportion of our voters have voter identity cards, proceedings in sensitive polling booths are video-graphed, political parties have free time on national television. Ballot papers and ballot boxes have been replaced by electronic voting machines. Results now get declared in one day. Each of these changes was, in some sense, a break-through. These improvements have contributed not only to the speedy conduct of elections but also to enhancing the transparency and credibility of the whole electoral process. I once again compliment the Election Commission of India and all those who are associated with the good work it has done all these years.

While we applaud the achievements of the Election Commission, and indeed Indian democracy, we would do well to ponder on some of the challenges that still lie ahead. There is a genuine concern that politics in our country is not attracting the best and the brightest among our people. It is also a matter of concern that educated professionals and the growing middleclass often shy away from the participation in the electoral process. Many of them are not even willing to take the trouble to cast their vote. Poor turn-out in many constituencies undermines, to some extent, the legitimacy of the victor in a 'first past the post' system that we follow. There is a general worry that people without sufficient means cannot contest elections. The background of many contestants, and quite often the winning ones, does not inspire confidence in the voters. There is no easy answer to these questions. While there is near unanimity that something needs to be done about these issues, there is no consensus on how exactly to go about it. The Election Commission has considered some of these problems and given its recommendations. The Standing Committee of our Parliament is also seized of many of these issues. I hope in the coming years we will be able to find solutions to these problems by consensus, and in the process improve the quality of our democracy.

Once again, I would like to wish the Election Commission all the best in its endeavours. I am sure that the Commission will continue to serve our nation with commitment and honour, as it has done in the past."

**DIAMOND JUBILEE CELEBRATIONS OF
THE ELECTION COMMISSION OF INDIA
25TH JANUARY, 2010**

Address by Shri Navin B. Chawla, Chief Election Commissioner of India

Hon'ble President of India, Smt. Pratibha Devisingh Patil

Hon'ble Vice President of India, Shri Mohammad Hamid Ansari

Hon'ble Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh

Esteemed Speaker, Smt. Meira Kumar

Minister for Law and Justice, Shri Veerappa Moily

**Minister for Communications and Information Technology,
Shri A. Raja**

The Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Smt. Sushma Swaraj

The Chairperson of the United Progressive Alliance, Smt. Sonia Gandhi

The Convener of the National Democratic Alliance, Shri Sharad Yadav

(May I add here that Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee, former Prime Minister of India and the Chairman of the National Democratic Alliance conveyed his inability to be present, for health reasons, and has extended his good wishes.)

My esteemed colleagues

Dr. S. Y. Quraishi

Shri V.S. Sampath

Distinguished guests

Today as we gather to celebrate the sixtieth year of the establishment of the Election Commission of India, the Commission stands overwhelmed by the scale of the response that our invitation has received. The presence of the highest dignitaries of our country on the dais, is testimony to their regard for the work of the Commission. Equally overwhelming is the presence of leaders from all recognised national parties and from recognised state parties. A former Prime Minister, members of Cabinet and Council of Ministers, Governors and Lt. Governors are in our midst, as are Chief Ministers and leaders of Opposition. We welcome more than thirty heads of electoral bodies, from all parts of the world. Each electoral democracy has its own unique experiences to share, which we look forward to doing in the days ahead. The Commonwealth is represented by the present of its Deputy Secretary General. More than a hundred countries are represented by their High Commissioners and Ambassadors. I am grateful, too, to six of India's former Chief Election Commissioners and two Election Commissioners who are with us.

I thank you all.

On 25th January, 1950, on the eve of Republic Day, when the Election Commission of India came into existence, it was not merely an inception of one more institution but an inauguration of a bold experiment which the intuitive wisdom of the makers of the Constitution chiselled into an independent body to deliver democracy to a country of immense diversity, which was bound together by a common will, to forge a national identity that transcends cultural, linguistic and ethnic differences. Each time a vote is cast, it is a reaffirmation of faith in the nation and in democracy.

The Constituent Assembly of India had, as a historic measure, adopted the principle of universal adult suffrage reposing faith in the wisdom of the common Indian to elect his representative to the seat of power. In order to make this happen, it created the Election Commission of India. Under Article 324 of the Constitution, the superintendence, direction and control of elections to Parliament and State Legislatures vest in the Election Commission.

We do believe that the Commission has been true, to the vision that the founding fathers of the Constitution, especially Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, had envisaged. It is significant that Article 324 that created the Commission was one of those exceptional provisions which were given effect to as early as on 26th November 1949.

The credit for upholding the democratic traditions of our nation must go primarily to the voters of India whose commitment to democracy is the driving spirit that guides the destiny of India as a modern democracy.

Political parties both at the national and state levels have displayed immense maturity and commitment to strengthening electoral democracy. Their remarkable contribution to the Indian electoral system is their decision to voluntarily adopt and abide by the provisions of the Model Code of Conduct, a unique document which has evolved to serve indeed as a moral code for Indian elections.

The conduct of a General Election in India is indisputably the largest management exercise in the world. The growing complexities of the electoral landscape have also thrown new challenges for election managers. We have been constantly innovating in our responses to address these challenges.

The Hon'ble Vice-President of India will shortly handover to the Hon'ble President a compilation of the Lok Sabha General Election, 2009. Our Chief Electoral Officers have ably documented their experience, difficulties and successes. The last General Election was also important because we were able to use advanced technology and increased communication mobility.

Ours is a vast land, and the planning of our election process necessarily incorporates our size, diversity, plurality, geography, climate and a host of other factors that create a large and often complex mosaic.

Although, we are a very small secretariat headquartered in Delhi, we have developed a unique way of micro managing elections that involves upto 716 million voters. We used over one million Electronic Voting Machines to cover almost 8,35,000 polling stations and in most cases used photo electoral rolls. I would take this occasion to commend all those who are involved in the election process for their commitment and integrity in delivering elections, sometimes against many odds. We also invited 70 Collectors who are also our District Election Officers chosen from all our States and UTs, as a representative sample as it were, of our key officials at the cutting edge.

We are, honoured, too that the Department of Posts has brought out a commemorative stamp to mark this eventful day. I would like to thank the Department for racing against time to create not just a stamp, but an emblem as it were of our ideals and practice.

In the process of fulfilling our Constitutional obligations, duties and responsibilities, the Commission has received unfettered endorsement through various judicial pronouncements and judicial interpretations of Constitutional provisions that have strengthened our hands.

The Commission has identified areas of priorities for reform and sent proposals to the Government of India which will doubtless receive their consideration.

There is ground that remains to be covered on multiple fronts. But the unflinching commitment of the people of India to democratic ideals represents the spirit of our times.

On behalf of the Election Commission of India, may I once again welcome this most distinguished audience.

Jai Hind.