Highlights of the President’s Address 2018

The President of India, Mr. Ram Nath Kovind, addressed a joint sitting of both Houses of Parliament on January 29, 2018. He outlined the major policy priorities of the government in his address. Key highlights of the address include:

Economy and Finance

▪ During the first quarter of 2016-17, the economy witnessed a temporary slowdown in GDP growth. The second quarter of 2017-18, has seen a reversal of this trend.

▪ The rate of inflation, current account deficit and fiscal deficit have shown a decline. Foreign exchange reserves in 2017-18 were more than USD 410 billion. FDI increased from USD 36 billion to USD 60 billion in the last three years.

▪ Taxation: The Goods and Services Tax was introduced. Further, the National Anti-Profiteering Authority was constituted so that the benefits of lower prices of goods and services are passed on to the consumers.

▪ Financial inclusion: About 31 crore Jan Dhan accounts have been opened. Percentage of savings accounts held by women has gone up from 28% to 40%.

▪ Under Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana, loans of over four lakh crore rupees have been provided through 10 crore sanctioned loans.

▪ Aadhaar: It has helped in saving Rs 57,000 crore by providing benefits of 400 schemes.

▪ Insurance: Under Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana and Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana, more than 18 crore poor have been covered and Rs two crore has been paid as claims. Under Atal Pension Yojana, 80 lakh senior citizens have been benefitted.

▪ Re-capitalisation of public sector banks has been decided by infusing more than Rs 2 lakh crore of capital to them.

Defence and Security

▪ Under One Rank One Pension, more than Rs 10,000 crore has been released to over 20 lakh retired armed forces personnel.

▪ The government sanctioned a scheme of more than Rs 18,000 crore for the modernisation of police forces.

Governance and Legal Reforms

▪ In the last three years, 1,428 obsolete laws have been repealed.

▪ Frequent elections not only impose a huge burden on human resources but also impede development. Therefore, simultaneous conduct of elections to Lok Sabha and State Assemblies should be considered.

Skill Development and Job Creation

▪ Under Atal Innovation Mission, over 2,400 Atal Tinkering Labs have been approved.

▪ Under the National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme, 5 lakh youth have been benefitted.

▪ Two schemes: SANKALP and STRIVE for skill development of youth have been approved.

Education

▪ The National Testing Agency has been approved to act as an autonomous and self-sufficient organisation to conduct all examinations of higher educational institutes.

▪ Aim to set up 20 Institutes of Eminence. Under this Mission, elected public sector institutions will be provided financial assistance of Rs 10,000 crore.

▪ The Indian Institutes of Management (IIM) Bill, 2017 was passed by Parliament. It declares the IIMs as institutions of national importance.

Health

▪ A new National Health Policy has been formulated for providing better and affordable healthcare facilities.

▪ Through Pradhan Mantri Jan Aushadhi Kendras, 800 medicines have been made available at affordable rates. More than 3,000 Kendras have been established.

▪ To enhance the availability of doctors, 7,000 post graduate seats and over 13,000 MBBS seats have been approved.

▪ To ensure quality and transparency in medical education, the National Medical Commission Bill was introduced in Lok Sabha.

▪ The Intensified Mission Indradhanush was recently launched. The annual rate of increase in immunisation coverage has increased from 1% to 6.7%.

Social Justice and Empowerment

▪ The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill, 2017, was introduced and passed by Lok Sabha.

▪ A Bill to provide constitutional status to the National Commission for Backward Classes was introduced in Parliament.

▪ Provisions have been made for 4% reservation in government jobs and 5% reservation in higher education for disabled people.

▪ The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 was enacted.
In the last three years, over 6,000 camps were organised impacting nine lakh disabled people with necessary aids and assistive devices.

Women and Child Development
- *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao* has been extended from 161 districts to 640 districts.

Labour
- The government is continuously working for reforms in labour laws. Minimum wages have been increased by more than 40%. In addition, the number of registers for compliance of labour laws has been reduced from 56 to five.
- The Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017 enhances maternity leave from 12 to 26 weeks.

Industry and Manufacturing
- India’s rank improved to 100 out of 190 countries in 2017, from its rank of 142 in the annual Ease of Doing Business report released by the World Bank.
- To give preference to Make in India in public procurement, a new policy has been formulated. This policy promotes domestic manufacturing and services.

Transport and Connectivity
- Under Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana, a target to provide road connectivity to every village by 2019 has been set. More than 82% villages have been connected by roads, as compared to 56% villages in 2014.
- Under the Sagarmala programme, works on Special Economic Zones in Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust, Smart Port Industries Cities, and Deen Dayal Port Trust have been taken up.
- Under the BharatNet Project, optical fibre cables now cover over one lakh panchayats.
- A new Metro Rail Policy with focus on last mile connectivity was formulated. Presently, work on Metro is in progress in 11 cities.
- Bharatmala has been approved and a provision of Rs. 5.3 lakh crore has been made. Under the project, about 53,000 km of National Highways have been identified.
- Under UDAN, work has been initiated to connect 56 airports and 31 helipads in 15 months. So far, flights have commenced from 16 such airports.

Energy
- India has become a net exporter of power. The government has ensured power availability to states at cheap rates by completing work on the One Nation, One Grid.
- Nearly 18,000 villages have been electrified.
- Under Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, over 3.3 core gas connections have been provided.
- Under UJALA, more than 28 crore LED bulbs have been distributed and the private sector has sold 50 crore LED bulbs. This has resulted in an annual saving of Rs 40,000 crore.

Urban and Rural Development
- More than 93 lakh houses have been constructed in rural and urban areas. Under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Urban, interest subvention of 6% has been provided. In addition, two new schemes have been launched for the middle class.

Agriculture and Water Resources
- To prevent damage to agricultural produce and to ensure its safe storage, Pradhan Mantri Kisan Sampada Yojana has been launched.
- Under Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana, farmers are being provided affordable and simple crop insurance services. During 2017, 5.7 crore farmers were provided protection.
- A scheme has been introduced in the dairy sector, under which a ‘Dairy Processing Infrastructure Development Fund’ with a corpus of Rs 11,000 crore has been set up.
- The government is committed to doubling farmers income by 2022. So far, agricultural commodities of about Rs 36,000 crore have been traded on the e-NAM portal.
- The Indian Forest (Amendment) Bill, 2017 was passed by Parliament. The Bill amends the definition of tree to remove the word bamboos.

Science and Technology
- ISRO successfully launched 104 satellites at one go. In June 2017, the first development flight of India’s GSLV MK-III was successfully launched.
- In May 2017, ISRO launched the South Asian Satellite. Further, on January 12, 2018, ISRO successfully launched the PSLV-C40. This marked a century of satellites being launched.

Development of North East
- The North East Special Infrastructure Development Scheme was sanctioned with 100% central assistance. Under the scheme, projects relating to drinking water supply, energy, and education will be completed.

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