

**SPEECH BY HER EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRIMATI PRATIBHA DEVISINGH PATIL, AT THE INAUGURAL LECTURE OF THE LECTURE SERIES ORGANISED BY THE UNION PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION (UPSC)**

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to compliment the Union Public Service Commission for the work it has done during its 83 years of existence. I am very happy to be speaking on "Governance and Public Service" at this function. The topic brings a focus on public service in an era when there is a repositioning of the concept of good governance as the role of the Government evolves to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

Governance is generally defined as the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage the affairs of the country at all levels. Governance must be undertaken in such a way that the well being of the citizen is effectively looked after through a properly organized institutional framework. Good governance implies people's participation, rule of law, transparency, responsiveness, consensus orientation in decision-making, equity and inclusion, effectiveness, efficiency along with accountability and a strategic mission.

Governance has been constantly developing so as to respond to the changing needs and challenges. However, the basic objective of governance has and must remain the welfare of the people. Those involved in governance, must never lose sight of the goal to work for public good and work in the spirit of the vision and values enshrined in our Constitution.

In the early post-Independence years, the focus of governance was on building institutions and the basic infrastructure of the new republic. Today, the priority is to confidently take the country forward into the competitive world of the 21st century. Reaching quality education to young girls and boys must occupy a foremost position in our national priorities if we are to be firmly positioned as leaders of a knowledge-based society where the premium will be on inventions and innovation. Also a system of governance that provides conditions in which the creative potential of its people is realized and the artistic talent, scientific temper and entrepreneurial spirit finds space for growth is the one that results in building human resources capable of contributing to the building of a great nation. These are the demands of the 21st century.

For placing India in this position, focus would need to be centered on propelling economic growth, following a growth trajectory that is inclusive and providing basic amenities to all its citizens. Governance will be judged by the manner in which policies of economic growth are implemented and the extent to which beneficial outcomes can be delivered to the people. Social welfare schemes occupy a central position in the endeavour to empower the disadvantaged sections of society so that they can join the national mainstream. One of the biggest failings has been the inability to deliver and implement welfare schemes. Reforms are necessary if the perception of eroded credibility and effectiveness of administration is to be corrected. Even as we implement schemes, a regular system of monitoring and evaluation of programmes and schemes should be put in place to ensure quality.

De-centralization is very important for it is a participatory form of governance that empowers people, particularly the underprivileged, the women and other disadvantaged sections of society. A people-centric administration with local institutions playing a leading role has the advantage of being closest to the people and hence, aware of their needs and concerns. The 73rd and the 74th Amendments to the Constitution have taken democracy to the grassroots. As a result, there are now 3.2 million elected representatives in village and town councils. We have to now see how to devolve greater decision-making powers to Panchayati Raj institutions for achieving the objective of good governance. However, for them to function effectively there should be proper training and capacity building at various levels - Gram Sabhas, Zila Parishads, Zonal levels. I would also like to emphasize proper co-operation and co-ordination between all levels of administration as delivering results is a combined responsibility.

There are several issues on which fresh perspectives are always required so as to bring in reforms. Some of the pertinent questions are whether the selection procedure adequately looks for qualities and skills required in a changing environment in which the civil services work? Whether the training process prepares the individual to take on the responsibilities of public service? Is there regular in-service training for bringing about better performance? Do performance assessment parameters fairly judge the work undertaken? Are measurable targets being set and is there accountability for the shortcomings and inability to meet targets? The Second Administrative Reforms Commission has studied many of these issues and has made valuable recommendations after extensive consultations with stakeholders. An early examination of these

recommendations and a decision about them would contribute to the reform of the governance process.

There are approaches on which there can be no difference or debate and which are fundamental for a good administration and I will now dwell on them.

Public servants must have firm moorings to moral values and principles. Our nation has been founded on human values and progressive ideas. Tolerance and harmony are the ethos of our civilization. Our independence struggle was fought on the basis of truth and non-violence. Public servants, being the wheels of administration and essential for running the affairs of the nation, must introspect on how they can reflect these values in their functioning. Discipline as well as commitment and dedication to work; and putting the nation above self, are qualities in a civil servant and, indeed, in any citizen that would help in building the nation. If public servants are disciplined and hardworking it would have a multiplier effect on society itself as they can by their own conduct and example, spur others in the same direction. While dealing with issues that have a human dimension, it is important that public authorities must be sensitive. Building a caring administration is important.

The system has to be made corruption free. Like a cancer, corruption is that sore which drains the strength of a nation. Corruption has deprived the nation of better infrastructure and better facilities. When only a fraction of the money is spent for the purpose for which it is allocated, the impact is far less than the intended or envisaged. For example, corruption in the public distribution system means that food meant for the poorer sections of society is not reaching them and as a result the national objective of removing poverty and hunger suffers. The people feel let down, the nation loses resources and we lag behind others. It is one malaise which brooks no delay.

Opaqueness results in red-tapism and unaccountability. There should be transparency in functioning. Withholding information from the public creates a distance between the civil servant and the people; it results in a gap between those responsible for governing and those for whose benefits the system operates. Transparency has a triple impact. It encourages civil servants to take decisions in a manner that can withstand public scrutiny. It brings home to the people the challenges that the government faces as it functions. It institutes a dialogue process in the country.

I am, therefore, glad that instruments like the RTI are giving to the citizens a platform to communicate with administration. This is important as governance is not purely a government function but it is a partnership between the Government and the people. Many schemes and programmes of the government are no longer being implemented by the Government alone, but with the support of NGOs and members of the civil society. Good governance, as a concept, becomes applicable to all sections of society - government, legislature, judiciary, the media, the private sector, the corporate sector, Non-Government Organizations (NGOs).

Today we operate in an environment in which there are many more tools of technology available. E-governance technology enables better communication systems, better data and information systems, quicker processing of the data and resultantly better delivery mechanism and monitoring of services. New technologies in the fields of electronics and information science must be harnessed in the service of the poor and the underprivileged and all civil servants must acquaint themselves with technological advances for better performance.

The Union Public Service Commission plays an important role in the governance process of the country. As a constitutional body, it has provided a strong institutional mechanism for the recruitment, appointment and career related matters of the members of India's civil services. It has set high standards for itself and has been recruiting persons of merit and ability, in an open and impartial manner. It has also shown a remarkable ability to respond to changing requirements by taking recourse to innovative and transparent reform initiatives. Better systems of selection will in the long run have a positive effect on the quality of governance.

I end by reiterating that in all circumstances the welfare of the people is the ultimate work and test. All work and policies must be geared to that final goal.

Thank you.

Jai Hind.