

ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY THIRU SURJIT SINGH BARNALA, GOVERNOR OF TAMIL NADU AT THE 'NATIONAL VOTERS' DAY CELEBRATIONS AT DARBAR HALL, RAJ BHAVAN, CHENNAI ON 25.01.2011 AT 11.00 A.M.

At the outset, I congratulate the Election Commission of India for its initiatives to celebrate 25th January, its Foundation Day, as the 'National Voters' Day' every year. I am sure that this will create an awareness among the citizens and enhance participation of more and more people in the democratic electoral process.

It is significant that the 'National Voters' Day' – 25th January falls the day before our Republic Day. It was on the 26th January, 1950, through adoption of universal adult franchise, every citizen of our nation has been bestowed with the right to choose a government through the democratic process of elections.

India is one of the largest democracies in the world. We stand as a symbol of democracy. No where, either now, or in the world's history, have ever millions of people, have been given the right to choose their government through the ballot box. We owe a lot to the founding fathers of our constitution for their wisdom and foresight to entrust the citizens of India with this democratic right – the right to vote – to elect their government.

We the people, through exercise of the voting right have the ultimate power to shape the destiny of our country. We elect our representatives who run the Government and take decisions for the growth, development and benefit of all the citizens. Election cannot be viewed as an isolated event. It is the very foundation of good democratic governance.

India and democracy are intertwined. Democracy is the very essence of our Constitution. It is a matter of great pride that we have conducted all the elections after Independence, peacefully and democratically. They have been free and fair in general. We need each and every adult, be it man or woman to actively participate in this democratic process.

The essence of democracy is elections. Putting together both the Houses of Parliament and all the State Legislatures alone, we have only about 5000 to 6000 persons representing a population of more than 1 billion.

I commend the Election Commission of India and all those who are associated with the conduct of General-Public Elections – a marathon exercise from time to time, free and fairly, renewing our faith and stability in our democratic system.

Even though we have made great and remarkable achievements, yet we have more challenges to overcome. To make our democratic process more cleaner, healthier and stronger, removal of impediments, lacunae and malpractices in the electoral process are imperative.

The people of this country are the strength of today and are the hope of tomorrow. The future rests on their shoulders. The power of voting and electing the representative of their choice rests with the people. The reins are in the people's hands. We need people's optimum participation in the democratic process. Every vote that is cast is a powerful force to reckon with.

We need each and every citizen to cast his vote. Voting is their democratic right. Staying away or eluding participation in the electoral process is a shame. Of late we see frustrated educated and middle class people staying away from casting their vote. Shedding away of a democratic responsibility is a shameful act and is an act of cowardice. Each and every citizen of our democratic country has a social responsibility and a participatory role in our democratic process.

I congratulate the 11.5 lakh persons who have actively, and willingly come forward with a heart and a mind to add their names in the Summary Revision Rolls 2011.

I am sure that this commitment towards democracy spreads amongst others too. I am pleased to learn that the First National Voters' Day is planned to be celebrated in a grand manner in Tamil Nadu with an aim to improve voter awareness, and to ensure greater participation of people in the electoral process.

Election is the "Festival of Democracy". We need maximum and fullest participation. I am confident that the National Voters Day Celebrations would motivate people who have not enrolled, to get enrolled; promote those who do not vote, to go and vote; embolden the voters to do so, fairly and fearlessly, without falling for false inducements.

I am glad that the Election Commission of India has chosen the theme, "Greater participation for a stronger democracy", for its Diamond Jubilee Year. The National Voters' Day pledge emphasizes on three core values. Every Indian citizen over 18 years should register as a voter. Every voter should cast his vote during elections without influence or any inducement and should strive to uphold the democratic traditions of our country and the dignity of free, fair and peaceful elections.

I wish the Election Commission of India and the voters of Tamil Nadu, fair, free and peaceful elections with greater participation for a stronger democracy.

Let us demonstrate that India is not only the largest, but also the best democracy in the world.

My greetings to all of you.

Jai Hind.

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