

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA,
SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND
ON THE OCCASION OF INAUGURATION OF
THE FESTIVAL OF DEMOCRACY BEING ORGANISED TO
MARK THE CONCLUSION OF DIAMOND JUBILEE OF KERALA
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

Thiruvananthapuram, August 6, 2018

1. I am glad to be here for the inauguration of the “Festival of Democracy”, being organised as part of the diamond jubilee commemoration of the Kerala legislative assembly. I would like to congratulate the people of the state and all the members and former members of the assembly, as well as officials and staff members who have worked here, for this milestone.
2. I would especially commend the Speaker for taking the initiative for this national-level Festival. I am told that it will comprise six different seminars on important themes of legislative democracy. These include empowering the weaker sections, particularly Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities; focusing on women and gender-related issues; making assembly proceedings more effective and outcome-oriented; engagement of the media and of students with parliamentary democracy; and finally the relevance and wider applicability of the Kerala developmental model.
3. All of these are extremely meaningful themes. I am confident that the discussions in the “Festival of Democracy” will provide actionable and practicable inputs for the progress of legislative democracy in our country. Such a celebration of ideas is entirely in keeping with Kerala’s rich intellectual legacy.
4. Politics, public life and the quality of democracy are a reflection of the essential ethos of a society. As such, the Kerala assembly and its debates and discussions, the

humanistic values that it has historically advocated and legislated on, are a mirror to the traditions of this state. It was Kerala that gave our nation a towering personality in the form of President K.R. Narayanan, my distinguished predecessor in Rashtrapati Bhavan. He rose to the highest office from extremely challenging circumstances, and did so with scholarship, hard work and determination.

5. Even in previous centuries, Kerala's social framework has encouraged debate and dialogue. This was the way of farsighted reformers such as Adi Shankaracharya, Sri Narayana Guru and Ayyankali. This was the motivation for the discourse between people of so many great faiths and spiritual traditions – Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam and others that have counted Kerala as among their earliest homes. A person may believe in one faith or the other – or he or she may not believe in any faith at all. That is not important. What is important is that the culture of educated and informed debate and of mutual accommodation that has been part of Kerala's DNA continues to be preserved. It must be preserved in public life and it must be preserved in this assembly.
6. In the past 60 years, this assembly has had the fortune of being strengthened by the voice and wisdom of public representatives of rare calibre. Among others these have comprised some of Kerala's earliest chief ministers, Shri E.M.S. Namboodiripad, Shri R. Shankar and Shri C. Achutha Menon; the cherished and much loved Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer, who was a member of the first assembly; the late stalwarts Shri K. Karunakaran and Shri E.K. Nayanar; veterans such as Shri V.S. Achuthanandan and Smt K.R. Gowri Amma, who is among the most respected women politicians of independent India; and contemporary figures like Shri A.K. Antony and the chief minister, Shri Pinarayi Vijayan. I have mentioned only some names. There are many others. This diamond jubilee is a tribute to their collective contribution.

Mr Speaker, Members of the House and Ladies and Gentlemen

7. From land reforms to panchayati raj, from literacy to healthcare, the people of Kerala have achieved a lot. This process has been aided by laws shaped and finalised in this House. It has led to social sector accomplishments that have come to be termed the “Kerala model”. As I have just mentioned, this will be discussed in one of the sessions of the Festival that is being inaugurated.
8. Yet, while looking back with satisfaction it is also important to look ahead with aspiration. Social sector investments in Kerala have helped the talented people of this state to contribute to not just our national economy but in different parts of the world. As teachers and healthcare providers, as technologists and businesspersons, as diligent workers and untiring construction labour, and of course in the tourism industry, young people from Kerala are much valued and much sought after as human capital.
9. The next stage of the “Kerala model” should be to ensure greater opportunities for the youth of Kerala in their home state itself. Of course, they are more than welcome to work anywhere in the country, but the gap in the incubation of entrepreneurial and business capacities in Kerala itself needs to be addressed by all stakeholders. I am confident that the discussions over the next two days will focus on this aspect as well.
10. There is one other concern to which I would like to draw your attention. As I have already emphasised, the history of debate, mutual dignity and respect for another’s point of view has been a hallmark of Kerala society. It has made Malayalis among the thought leaders of our country. These attributes have also influenced the civil and learned conduct of this House over the past 60 years. Nevertheless there remains the paradox of political violence in Kerala, especially in some regions of the state.

11. This is unfortunate and does little justice to the glorious traditions of the state and its people. It is important for all political groups and all enlightened citizens to do their utmost to curb the development of such tendencies. Debate, dissent and disagreement are perfectly acceptable and should be welcomed in our polity. But violence has no place in our Constitution. It would be appropriate if we could give some thought to this at a "Festival of Democracy". The people of Kerala, and the citizens of India, deserve that we do serious thinking on the issue.

12. In conclusion, I once more congratulate the people of the state and the members of this House on the diamond jubilee of the Kerala legislative assembly. I also wish all participants the very best for the "Festival of Democracy". And last but not the least I would like to convey my wishes in advance for the festival of Onam, which falls later this month. May it bring joy and prosperity to every family and every home in Kerala.

Thank you
Jai Hind!