

SPEECH BY

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ON THE OCCASION OF THE
REPUBLIC DAY PARADE

AT **CENTRAL STADIUM**
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

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Friends,

It is just nine months since I left the din and bustle of Delhi, to join you all in this lovely State. It is, therefore, with special sentiment that I extend my warm personal greetings to everyone in Kerala, and to all Malayalis, ubiquitous as they are, across the globe.

2. On this 53rd anniversary of our Republic, as one born in pre-Independent India, random reflections on our nation, and its great sons who made the dream of a free India a reality, fill my mind. Lucky to have seen at close quarters the radiant personality of the Mahatma, our generation still cherishes those memories as a ***moveable feast***.
3. Those of us born in independent India may not be aware of the incredible tales of our great patriots-their determination, dedication, self-discipline, and above all their sacrifice. Fortunate to have spent more than three score years in public life, traversing every nook of our motherland, and almost the whole world, I can tell you there is no country as beautiful as ours. Old as the Ganges, majestic as the Himalayas, she is indeed an exciting confluence of diverse customs. Despite being a '***variety wonderland***,' unique is the solidarity of our people towards the common goal-***India-to make it great, greater***. There is nothing half as precious as being an Indian. If there is a rebirth, I long to be born again an Indian.
4. One more year has rolled on since we became a Republic. Year after year, this day, we look back, only to look forward with renewed commitment. On the international front, there is turbulence, which threatens to escalate into war. The

gathering clouds, let us be optimistic, would give way to the silver lining of peace. In India, we have had events that kept us all on tenterhooks. Happily, there were also glad tidings as from Jammu and Kashmir, where people reiterated their unflinching faith in democracy, exhibiting the exuberance at being able to elect the government of their choice, even in the face of extreme threats, from across the border. Closer home, the flare-up at Marad, the feud between two Church factions, and a spate of agitations marred our otherwise peaceful record. Better sense, I hope, would prevail.

5. The other day I was reading an essay by E.M.Forster on 'Tolerance'. Tolerance, I felt, sounds like putting with something we abhor. To me it seems, the world would be much better if we learn **to respect everyman's faith without attempting to rationalise or analyse it.**
6. Little do we see in those around us-the determinations and tireless striving to brave any odd in the great adventure called life. My mind goes out to Kasaragode, where a girl child, Sumitra, aged just 7, fends like a responsible mother her two-year old brother and sister, half her age. Her mother is no more, and father labors the whole day to make ends meet. I see in Sumitra the representative of our new generation, the fire of the resurgent Kerala. **Never flinch; never weary; never despair,** seems what she is telling us. Let me also compliment the dedicated reporter of this piece, Surendran Neeleswaram, albeit posthumously. The generous public response that came to the aid of Sumitra was equally commendable.
7. It is with deep sense of loss, and deeper sense of guilt, that we remember the Kumarakom tragedy. It was only thanks to the instant rescue act by local fishermen and sand miners who plunged into the backwaters, risking their lives, that many were saved from the watery grave. Such spontaneous goodness signifies the sublime human spirit latent in our common folk. Let us hail them! Their resilience to rise to the occasion disproves the general notion that labour in Kerala is insensitive. This, I believe, would stand us in good stead as we launch ourselves as investor-friendly.

8. **“Great things are done when men and mountains meet.”** The last few days witnessed an ecstatic jubilation in our State. In perfect unison, the Central and State Governments, and the private entrepreneurs joined hands towards one agenda-a bold initiative for a vibrant, dynamic Kerala. I am confident, this unprecedented gush of massive investment that is bound to take place in information technology and other vital sectors will take us far, if only we seize the moment, and see the door in every wall.
9. A.G. Gardiner in his ‘On the Rule of the Road’ reminds us how very important it is to follow certain norms if we have to move forward. To prosper as citizens of this glorious nation, we need to practice self-imposed discipline, **“fill the unforgiving minute with sixty seconds’ worth of distance run,”** and guard like a treasure trove the unity and integrity of the Indian Union. I am reminded of the words of Longfellow that inspired world leaders in the trying days of the turbulent Forties:

**“.....sail on, O Ship of State!
Sail on, O Union, strong and great!
Humanity with all its fears,
With all the hopes of future years,
Is hanging breathless on thy fate!”**

10. Yes, on the fate of our nation hangs the fate of all of us.

**“Who lives if India dies?
Who dies if India lives?”**

JAI HIND