We, the people of India, are celebrating our 71st Republic Day today, with unspeakable joy and pride. Let me therefore, begin by conveying my heartiest Republic Day greetings and best wishes to everyone present here and to other Keralites all over the world.

It was on this day in 1950 that we became a Republic, by giving unto ourselves, a Constitution: our national scripture that promised to secure Justice, Liberty, Fraternity and Dignity to all its citizens and to ensure the unity and integrity of Indian Nation.

The Constitution further obliged us to abide by it, to respect its ideals and institutions and to cherish and follow the noble ideals which inspired our national struggle and among other things, to strive towards excellence in all spheres of individual and collective activity to achieve higher levels of endeavor and achievement.
The founding fathers of our nation considered Democracy as a sacred trust and so they adopted a Constitution that fully reflects the eternal Indian ethos, values and traditions.

Since remotest times, our Indianness has been rooted in diversity which implies both respect and acceptance of variety. Ancient India believed, as we do, that diversity itself can be a source of strength and that all people should not be confined to a single interpretation of Reality. From the sparkling snows of the Himalayas in the north to the verdant forests of Kerala came the proclamation of an eternal truth: that Reality is One but is perceived as many.

एकं सदृ विष्णू बहुधा वदन्ति

It is in this acceptance of diversity that India has always sheltered the persecuted people of the world. Here I would like to use the ringing words of Swami Vivekananda which had mesmerized the Chicago Parliament of Religions. He said and I quote:

“I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance.

I am proud to tell you that we have gathered in our bosom the purest remnant of the Israelites, who came to Southern India and took refuge with us in the very year in which their holy temple was
shattered to pieces by Roman tyranny. I am proud to belong to the religion which has sheltered and is still fostering the remnant of the grand Zoroastrian nation”.

And that explains why our ancient scriptures define India as the landmass between the Himalayas in the North and the Ocean in the South and all those who live here as her children.

उत्तरम् यत समुदस्य, हिमाद्रेचैव दक्षिणम।
वषं तद भारतम् नाम, भारती यत्र संतति।

Therefore, our Republic Day is both an occasion to celebrate this India which is ancient but never old and an occasion to pledge to uphold and strengthen our national unity.

Let us also gratefully remember and salute the lakhs of people, whose struggle, hard work and selfless sacrifice had earned us the freedom and democracy we enjoy today.

India’s concept of true freedom has always involved a sense of responsibility, which reflects in all our discussions on democracy and progress. Today, we are the largest and the liveliest democracy in the world.
We are also one among the powerful nations, with proven leadership in areas as diverse as space science, military preparedness, food production, agriculture, entertainment etc.

Besides, with the largest population of young people in the world, we are about to enjoy the fruits of a demographic dividend which will empower our youth with lucrative careers.

As we look back on our long journey towards progress, what strikes our attention is the transformation of a poor economy to one with the promise of a fast growth.

Today, India is the second largest reservoir of scientific and technical manpower and the third most attractive investment destination for technology transactions in the world.

As a nation which has touched the Moon and Mars, India is comfortably placed in the race for Space. In the last one year, Indian Space Research Organization did us proud by successfully accomplishing 13 missions including six launch vehicle missions and seven satellite missions. For us, the sky is no longer the limit.

India has the third largest armed forces, regularly fortified with the most modern training, weaponry and technology. The latest
example is the successful test firing of the K-4 submarine launched ballistic missile.

We are a peace loving nation, which believes in mutual respect and friendly cooperation with neighboring and other countries. Our ancient wisdom tells us first to use reason and good advice to stop aggression and if it fails, then deter it by use of force.

अग्रत: चतुरो वेदा: पृष्ठत: सशरं धनु

इदं ब्राह्मण इदं क्षत्रे शापादपि शरादपि

He knows four Vedas by heart and carries weapons on his back meaning he has both the Brahmtej and Kshatratej.

He will subdue the wrongdoers by reason and logic and failing that he will use weapons

It is said that the essential means of bringing about a new society is Education. The Union Government, led by Hon’ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has, therefore, been emphasizing the vision for ‘Transforming India’ by transforming Education with the mantra of सबको शिक्षा, अच्छी शिक्षा or Education for All, Quality Education. Our New Education Policy aims to usher in quality education, innovation and research, to enable India to become a knowledge super power.
When our nation dreams of transforming itself through Education, our beloved State of Kerala can never be far behind.

In fact, we have been a step ahead of others, in achieving total digital education by bringing all schools under the ambit of digital technology, thereby laying a strong foundation for future education.

Kerala’s development initiatives under the leadership of Chief Minister Shri Pinarayi Vijayan have brought well deserved recognition to the State in many areas. Standing first in the Sustainable Development Goal Index developed by United Nations Organization and NITI Ayog, emerging first in the Health and Public Education sectors as per NITI Ayog index and being a model to the country in terms of welfare and gender equality are some examples of our progress. Kerala also holds an enviable place in the India Innovation Index of NITI Ayog.

Our achievements in Health, especially the recording of the lowest maternal mortality ratio, National Quality Assurance Standards Certification to more government hospitals and e-Health programme, merit special mention.
It is with an eye on people’s health and the protection of our environment that Keala has effected a total ban on single-use plastic from this year.

At a time when India has emerged as a global investment destination and one of the easiest places for doing business, Kerala has offered the most liberal terms to entrepreneurs. This has energized our Start up ecosystem, which has been ranked ninth in the country.

Kerala’s electric vehicle policy has also encouraged Start up ventures in the renewable energy sector.

Our growing investment in Information Technology is a promise of more employment to our graduates.

In tune with the national policy of leveraging the immense diplomatic potential of our non-resident citizens, Kerala has achieved the promise of significant investments at the recently organized Loka Kerala Sabha. Our attention was not confined to investments; it was also directed towards the welfare of our Pravasi community.

The Pravasi Legal Aid Cell and the Call Centre have received positive response from non-resident Keralites, especially in the context of Indian Missions abroad being more helpful to the diaspora.
The revival of our agriculture was part of the Navakeralam Mission initiated by Kerala. Today, in tune with the nation’s idea of e-NAM or One nation One Market, we have given thrust to value addition and agri-preneurship, which have been widely hailed.

The real sweetness of Kerala’s achievements lies in the gravity of the adversities we faced in the last two years. First, it was the devastating flood and then came the ruthless landslides. But, with a rare spirit of oneness, we overcame those hurdles with a courage and grace that reflected the true character of Kerala society. The Rebuild Kerala Initiative is now helping people to bring back the glory and progress that the two disasters snatched away from us.

Financial constraints have at times, caused impediments in realizing some projects, but we have moved ahead, using innovative ways like the floating of Masala Bonds, launching of Kerala Bank etc. However, constraints have not dampened Kerala’s commitment to the welfare of the weaker sections. We have also ensured minimum wages for all sectors in the State.

On 26th November 2019, we began a year-long celebration of the 70th anniversary of our Constitution to reiterate its values and
principles and to remind citizens about their rightful role in strengthening our Democracy.

Therefore, as citizens or as people holding various positions, we are duty bound to respect and strictly follow the Constitution with faith in the Gandhian thought that ‘the true source of rights is duty. If we discharge our duties, rights will not be far to seek’

It is through such loyalty that we build a stronger and more progressive India, where pluralism is extolled, where dissent is acknowledged and respected, where conflicts give way to understanding and mere tolerance matures into heartfelt acceptance.

Such an India was the Heaven of Freedom that Gurudev Tagore once visualized; it is for us to build that heaven. On this Republic Day, let us pledge to build it, in our own lifetime.

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