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Prime Minister's Office :

P.M.'S ADDRESS AT THE GOLDEN JUBILEE COMMEMORATION FUNCTION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ATOMIC ENERGY AND FOUNDATION STONE LAYING OF THE FAST BREEDER PROGRAMME

18:57 IST

Following is the text of Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh's address at the Golden Jubilee Commemoration Function of the Department of Atomic Energy and Foundation Stone laying of the Fast Breeder Programme at Kalpakkam, today.

"Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, Dr. Kakodkar, Director General of IGCAR (and other dignitaries….) Friends,

"It is a pleasure to be present on this historic occasion which marks the Golden Jubilee of the Department of Atomic Energy and coinciding with the commencement of Fast Breeder Technology (FB Tech).

Our nuclear programme takes a major step forward today with launching of the commercial phase of the fast breeder programme. This is an occasion to celebrate and also to reflect on our past achievements and also to look to the future with hope, courage and confidence. The progress during past 50 years have made us proud.

Under Jawaharlal Nehru's wise leadership, India was among the first group of countries to recognize the vast potential of unlocking the powers of the atom. The Department of Atomic Energy was established in August 1954. Even prior to that, as early as 1948, steps were already afoot to develop our country's capabilities in harnessing the tremendous potential of atomic energy for peaceful purposes.

In the last 50 years, we have crossed several milestones in this arduous journey. This has been a tireless quest for scientific and technological excellence some of which I would like to recall. APSARA, set up in Trombay was the first research reactor in Asia. Trombay was also the site where the first lot of fuel elements for CIRUS was fabricated. It was as early as in 1965 that the plutonium plant stated functioning. In 1974, the country conducted a peaceful nuclear explosion. In the mid-1980s, steps were taken to diversify our nuclear programme further. Some of these programmes have come to fruition today.

Our nation owes a debt of gratitude to the founders of our nuclear programme. Dr. Homi Bhabha, the father of India's atomic energy programme, was a great visionary. He laid the foundations of this national treasure of self-reliant development, nurturing a whole generation of outstanding scientists and engineers. As a former Member of the Atomic Energy Commission, I remember working with Dr. Homi Sethna and Dr. Raja Ramanna who played an outstanding role in the growth and development of our atomic energy programme. I also recall with gratitude and pride the excellent contributions made by Dr. Iyengar, Dr. Srinivasa, Dr. Chidambaram and now, Dr. Kakodkar. It is therefore sad that Dr. Ramanna is not with us at this juncture when we are celebrating the Golden Jubilee of the Department of Atomic Energy. I would also like to recognize the contributions of all the scientists and employees of the Department who have contributed so magnificently to the nation's achievements in this field of national endeavour.

The activities of the Department of Atomic Energy range from fundamental scientific research to developmental applications of use to the common man – in the fields of health, industry, food preservation and water desalination projects. It is a matter of deep satisfaction that our scientists have mastered practically all the aspects related to the release of nuclear energy. This has contributed to our nation's security and well being in a fundamental sense.

Energy Security is an issue of vital importance, particularly in the context of the accelerating pace of our economic growth. If we succeed in instituting an optimal mix of energy resources in which nuclear energy is an important component, we will be able to ensure our energy security. India's low per capital energy consumption currently cannot for long go hand in hand with our quest for an accelerated pace of economic growth.

Energy Security is therefore a national imperative. We must break the constraining limits of power shortages, which retard our development. Nuclear energy is not only cost effective, it is also a cleaner alternative to fossil fuels. We are determined as a nation to utilize its full potential for the national good. It can also be a much needed cushion against fluctuations of prices of petroleum products.

Nuclear power today accounts for only two per cent of our overall installed capacity. We have now embarked on a major programme to generate 20,000 megawatts of nuclear power by the year 2020. By 2008, we hope to add 4000 megawatts including the two 1000-megawatt nuclear reactors coming up at Kudankutam in collaboration with the Russian Federation.

It is a matter of national pride that India has development comprehensive capabilities in the entire gamut of fuel cycle operations. India is also among the select group of countries which have the ability to recover plutonium from irradiated nuclear fuel and use it to produce power in thermal as well as in fast reactors. This path will ensure for us a large quantum of nuclear power on a sustainable basis.

Ladies and gentlemen, India is uniquely placed to utilize technologies required for launching the third stage of our nuclear power programme based on the utilization of thorium. The technology roadmap prepared by the Department of Atomic Energy for this purpose will receive our Government's fullest support. Fast breeder reactor technology is of crucial importance in enhancing our nuclear power capacity. By launching its commercial applications, we are indeed entering a new and more advanced stage of nuclear energy production, a technology mastered only by a very small group of countries.

The Department of Atomic Energy has been able to consolidate and strengthen our indigenous capabilities in the face of externally imposed limitations and constraints. These have, however, spurred us to greater levels of achievement. The founding principles of 'Atomic for Peace" were subverted by restrictions derived from an ineffective non-proliferation region. Despite these limitations, our scientists to their great credit have excelled time and again in demonstrating our indigenous capabilities measuring to the highest standards in the global nuclear industry."