

Mr.Vajpayee's Statement, 53rd Session, 24th Sept 1998 at UNGA

Mr President,

May I congratulate you on your election to the Presidency of the 53rd UN General Assembly? We wish you well in our shared endeavours in the United Nations and offer you our full cooperation. We would like to thank your predecessor for his engagement and contribution and to compliment him for the work throughout the last year.

2.I first addressed this august Assembly of the UN as Foreign Minister in 1977. Since then I have had the privilege to come for the General Assembly sessions for many years but it was without ministerial responsibility. I acknowledge with gratitude the confidence of successive Prime Ministers. To me it also signifies the consensus on national interests and the foreign policy of India. When I addressed the General Assembly in 1977, it was the turning point in many ways in the history of India. The Janata Government was a coalition of many factions who united in the restoration of our people's faith in democracy. Since then we have had many changes of Government but the people's political awareness and their faith in the institutions which uphold our constitutional system has been unwavering. Today, when I come to this podium as Prime Minister I come on behalf of another coalition. India has demonstrated that democracy can take root in a developing country. I am confident that the Indian experience will prove that democracy can also provide the basis for stable, long-term economic growth in developing societies. This is the path that the people of India have chosen and I stand before you today as the symbol of this new resurgent India.

3. Mr President, the world of the 1970's has receded into history. The shackling constraints of the Cold War are gone. The distinguishing feature of the last two decades has been the spread of democracy world-wide. By force of example, we have been one of the authors of the triumph of democracy. From this flows our desire to see democratisation of the UN itself. An international body that does not reflect, and change with, the changing international realities, will inevitably face a credibility deficit. We, therefore, support a revitalised and effective UN, one that is more responsive to the concerns of the vast majority of its member States and is better equipped to meet the challenges ahead of us in the 21st century.

4. The Security Council does not represent contemporary reality; it

does not represent democracy in international relations. Following the end of the Cold War, it has acquired the freedom to act but experience shows that the Council has acted only when it was convenient for its permanent members. The experience of Somalia does not do credit to the Security Council and there are other examples too. Peace-keeping operations cannot be a reflection of ulterior political priorities and perceptions.

5. There is only one cure - to bring in fresh blood. The Security Council must be made representative of the membership of the United Nations. Developing countries must be made permanent members. It is a right to which the developing world is entitled. Presence of some developing countries as permanent members is inescapable for effectively discharging the responsibilities of the Security Council particularly when we see that the Council acts almost exclusively in the developing world. It is only natural that on decisions affecting the developing world, these countries have a say, on equal terms. Along with other measures, the Security Council too must be reformed, expanding its nonpermanent membership so that more developing countries can serve on it. But this alone is not enough. Because as long as effective power in the Council rests with the permanent membership, the interests of the developing world will not be promoted or protected unless developing countries are made permanent members, on par with the present permanent members. Only this will make the Council an effective instrument for the international community in dealing with current and future challenges. The new permanent members must of course have the ability to discharge the responsibilities that come with permanent membership. India believes it can, and, as we had said before from this rostrum, we are prepared to accept the responsibilities of permanent membership, and believe we are qualified for it.

6. It will be a great day when democracy becomes the universal norm, and when the UN reflects this democracy in its institutions and functioning, However, open democratic societies have one scourge to contend with - terrorism. The challenge before countries like mine and other democracies is to maintain our openness, safeguard individual rights, and, at the same time, give no quarter to terrorists. Several speakers before me have recounted the terrible toll, worldwide, that terrorists have exacted, taking advantage of the trust that characterises open societies. I recall that the G-7 Summit almost two decades back had identified terrorism as one of the most serious threats to civilised societies, Events since then including the blowing up of Air India Kanishka, the Pan Am Airlines over Lockerbie,

to the recent bombings in Nairobi and Dar-es-Salaam - have only established the correctness of that judgement.

7. Mr. President, terrorism is one threat that affects us all equally. Terrorism takes a daily toll across the world. It is the most vicious among international crimes, the most pervasive, pernicious and ruthless threat to the lives of men and women in open societies, and to international peace and security. In India, we have had to cope with terrorism, aided and abetted by a neighbouring country, for nearly two decades. We have borne this with patience, but none should doubt the strength of our resolve to crush this challenge. Its tentacles have spread across the world. Today, it has linkages with illicit trade in drugs, arms and money laundering. In short, terrorism has gone global and it can only be defeated by organised international action.

8. Let us make up our minds once and for all - terrorism is a crime against humanity. Unilateral steps can hardly stand scrutiny in an open society, let alone in the eyes of the international community. It should be the primary task of all open and plural societies to develop collective means for tackling this menace. At the summit meeting in Durban, the Non-Aligned Movement has called for an international conference in 1999 to develop such a collective response. We urge that the 1999 conference launch the process of negotiations for an international convention to provide for collective action against States and organisations which initiate or aid and abet terrorism.

9. In this fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, there is a growing realisation that economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights form a seamless web. Analyses carried out in recent years by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees amply reflect the vicious cycle of how violations of economic, social and cultural rights inevitably lead to violations of civil and political rights. In defining its index, the Human Development Report gives a higher weightage to economic criterion for developing countries; this weightage is reduced for developed countries, highlighting the importance of the right to development for developing societies. It is therefore a matter of concern that the absolutism sought to be advocated in the promotion of human rights is often at the cost of the right to development.

10. India has ratified both the Covenant on Economic, Social and

Cultural Rights and the Covenant of Civil and Political Rights. Other institutions in our country - the National Human Rights Commission, a free media, an independent judiciary - all serve to assure that the international human rights statutes are enjoyed by all citizens. We also remained convinced that unless progress is made on economic, social and cultural rights including the right to development, the world will continue to witness international conflict leading to migrations, displacement of people and human rights abuses.

11. In the closing years of the 20th century, the challenge of nuclear disarmament is another of the priorities facing the international community. We have successfully prohibited chemical and biological weapons in recent decades. The present century has witnessed the development and the tragic use of nuclear weapons. We must ensure that the legacy of this weapon of mass destruction is not carried into the next century.

12. For the last half-century, India has consistently pursued the objectives of international peace along with equal and legitimate security for all through global disarmament. These concepts are among the basic tenets of our national security. India has, over the years, sought to enhance its national security by promoting global nuclear disarmament, convinced that a world free of nuclear weapons enhances both global and India's national security.

13. The negotiations on a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) began in 1993 with a mandate that such a treaty would "contribute effectively to the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons in all aspects, to the process of nuclear disarmament and therefore, to the enhancement of international peace and security". India participated actively and constructively in the negotiations, and sought to place the Treaty in a disarmament framework by proposing its linkage with a time-bound programme for the universal elimination of all nuclear weapons.

14. It is a matter of history that India's proposals were not accepted. The treaty, as it emerged, was not accepted by India on grounds of national security. We made explicit our objection that despite our stand having been made clear, the treaty text made India's signature and ratification a pre-condition for its entry into force.

15. Mindful of its deteriorating security environment which has obliged us to stand apart from the CTBT in 1996, India undertook a limited series of five underground tests, conducted on 11 and 13 May, 1998. These tests were essential for ensuring a credible nuclear deterrent for India's national security in the foreseeable future.

16. These tests do not signal a dilution of India's commitment to the pursuit of global nuclear disarmament. Accordingly, after concluding this limited testing programme, India announced a voluntary moratorium on further underground nuclear test explosions. We conveyed our willingness to move towards a de jure formalisation of this obligation. In announcing a moratorium, India has already accepted the basic obligation of the CTBT. In 1996, India could not have accepted the obligation as such a restraint would have eroded our capability and compromised our national security.

17. Mr. President, India, having harmonised its national imperatives and security obligations and desirous of continuing to cooperate with the international community is now engaged in discussions with key interlocutors on a range of issues, including the CTBT. We are prepared to bring these discussions to a successful conclusion, so that the entry into force of the CTBT is not delayed beyond September 1999. We expect that other countries, as indicated in Article XIV of the CTBT, will adhere to this Treaty without conditions.

18. After protracted discussions, the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva is now in a position to begin negotiations on a treaty that will prohibit the production of fissile materials for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices. Once again, we are conscious that this is a partial step. Such a treaty, as and when it is concluded and enters into force, will not eliminate existing nuclear arsenals. Yet, we will participate in these negotiations in good faith in order to ensure a treaty that is non-discriminatory and meets India's security imperatives. India will pay serious attention to any other multilateral initiatives in this area, during the course of the negotiations in the CD.

19. As a responsible state committed to non-proliferation, India has undertaken that it shall not transfer these weapons or related know-how to other countries. We have an effective system of export controls and shall make it more stringent where necessary, including by expanding control lists of equipment and technology to make them more contemporary and effective in the context of a nuclear India.," At the same time, as a developing country, we are conscious that nuclear

technology has a number of peaceful applications and we shall continue to cooperate actively with other countries in this regard, in keeping with our international responsibilities.

20. A few weeks ago, at the Non-Aligned Summit Durban, India proposed, and the Movement agreed that an international conference be held, preferably objective of arriving at an agreement, before the end of this millennium on a phased programme for the complete elimination of all nuclear weapons. I call upon all members of the international community, and particularly the other nuclear weapon states to join in this endeavour. Let us pledge that when we assemble here in the new millennium it shall be to welcome the commitment that mankind shall never again be subjected to the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons.

21. Mr. President, the decade of the 1990s has fallen far short of expectations; nowhere is this more apparent than on the global economic scene. The sense of triumphalism that heralded the wave of global capitalism is now giving way to caution and realism. What was initially seen as an Asian flu is now spreading to other continents.

22. The hypothesis that unfettered capital flows would foster economic development with the global financial markets adjusting the exchange rates stands falsified. What we have seen is the growth of a large volume of "virtual money" that has not been generated by productive economic activity. But the power of the "virtual money" is real, evident in the fact that national regulatory mechanisms are unable to cope with the impact of its rapid movement in and out of currencies. Its volatility in the short run does not follow economic logic but rumour and sentiment, with results that are self-reinforcing. In developing countries and in western financial capitals, there is now a growing acceptance that premature liberalisation of capital markets has been a primary cause of the current crisis.

23. Does it mean that the world should turn back from globalisation? Our answer is an emphatic NO. Rising economic inter-dependence is a phenomenon driven by the technological imperative, but we must learn how to manage the change. India has not been affected as severely as some other countries, largely because we adopted policies that were more prudent. But a drop in commodity prices by 30 per cent in a year and a reduction in net capital flows by 50 per cent to the emerging markets will have a negative impact on growth everywhere, including in the developed world.

24. I must emphasise that democratically elected leadership in open developing societies, such as India, also faces another challenge. We cannot let an unbridled free market system aggravate existing economic and social disparities. In fact, we need policy instruments to reduce disparities thus creating a more stable environment in the long term. Such policies are necessary in accountable democracies and in no way inconsistent with managed liberalisation.

25. It is high time, Mr. President, that we begin a new international dialogue, on the future of a global and inter-dependent economy. This is a task for the sovereign states represented here and cannot be left solely to the dynamics of an unregulated market place.

26. Ladies and Gentlemen, Friends, I think I speak for all of us when I say that we are on the threshold of a new age. This is an over-used phrase, but we are all aware that an exciting new universe is within our reach. Several centuries ago, Isaac Newton described his scientific discoveries as pebbles on the beach, while the Ocean of Truth lay undiscovered. It was modest of that great scientist to so describe his work, but I believe that we are now actually sailing in the Ocean of Truth. We have made exciting discoveries and will make many more which will move humankind forward.

27. And yet, there is also an uneasy feeling that all is not well. The world is not at ease with itself. Forces are bubbling under the surface tranquility in almost all parts of the world that threaten the gains of the last century, and which seek to lead the world towards bigotry, violence and unhealthy exclusivism.

28. India has a message : not a new one, for almost all religions have expressed the thought before. But we have preserved the tenets - of freedom, equality and tolerance in our daily lives. If the world of the 21st century is to be a better place than the world we have seen so far, these values must prevail. History also shows that these are easier to prescribe than to observe. And yet, as we move towards ever-closer interdependence. there is no alternative. The world and its leaders must summon the will to rise to the occasion and enter the new age with a new outlook. This is the task before us and I declare India's readiness to make its full contribution in the testing times ahead.

29. I close with an ancient sloka from the Rig Ved composed thousands of years ago in Sanskrit, the oldest language in the World:

"Svastir manushebhyaha

Oordhvam Jugatu beshajam

Sam no astu dvipathe

Sam Chathusthpate

Om Shanti, Shanti, Shanti".

meaning:

Let all human beings be blessed with prosperity. Let all flora and fauna which are life line of all creatures, grow abundantly, Let there be harmony With all two-legged creations. Let there be harmony with all four-legged creations.. Let there be peace, peace, peace. (Om Shanti, Shanti, Shanti.)

Thank you, Mr President.