

PRIME MINISTER SHRI CHARAN SINGH'S BROADCAST TO
THE NATION ON THE EVE OF CHILDREN'S DAY ON 14-11-1979

Friends,

Children's day in this International Year of the Child should serve as a reminder to us of the neglect of the child. Large numbers of the children in metropolitan towns are born on pavements. Large numbers in the villages are forced work for a living when they should be playing, singing, dancing and reading. Unless we as a Government and as a people feel for the poor observance of the Children's Day may become a ritual, an exercise in escapism and self-deception There are more than 250 million children in our country below 14 years of age. 80 per cent of them live in the villages. Infant mortality continues to be high. Our constitutional commitment to children and our national policy for children have to be reflected in action here and now. The revised minimum needs programme should be sincerely implemented to that the people's basic needs like health-care, education and communication are quickly met. There can be no gradualism in these matters. Governments at the Centre and in the states, social organisations and individuals, should work together for the quick ending of poverty, social and economic deprivation and unemployment. Schemes for immunization against diseases and child care and health centres should be executed fast and sincerely. Government's policy on education envisages special incentives like mid day meal, free uniform and free textbooks for poor children. Child labour can be abolished only when legislation is accompanied by such incentives and also by schemes for full employment of the child as also adults. All those engaged in child welfare work should bring to their task a touch of compassion only those who feel and care for the child can serve the child; otherwise our scheme will end in wasteful spending on frills. I appeal to all, particularly the affluent to contribute generously to the national children's fund. Only if children are happy and gay, healthy and educated, well fed and well clothed, can we prosper as a nation. To this end we should dedicate ourselves everyday and every year, particularly on this day and in this year.

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