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**UNION FINANCE MINISTER’S SPEECH AT CLOSING CEREMONY
OF VATSALYA MELA**

**New Delhi: Karthika 27, 1933
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The text of the Speech of the Union Finance Minister Shri Pranab Mukherjee at the Closing Ceremony of the Vatsalya Mela at Delhi Haat near INA here today is given below:

It gives me great pleasure to be here today to be a part of the closing ceremony of Vatsalya Mela, 2011. I congratulate the Ministry of Women and Child Development for organising such an important event annually to generate awareness amongst the people about policies, programmes, and initiatives of the Government in addressing the issues concerning women and children.

2. We all understand what Vatsalya means, we have experienced in our life-the wonder that is mother, her unbounded love for her children. This year the Mela was inaugurated on Children’s day, on the birthday of our late Prime Minister Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, architect of modern India whose vision was to build a “noble mansion of free India, where all her children may dwell”. The closing ceremony of the Mela, is taking place today which is on the ‘National Integration Day’, a day that marks the birth anniversary of our first woman Prime minister, Smt. Indira Gandhi, an ideal for millions of women in this country.

3. I am told that this year the Ministry had three themes for the Vatsalya Mela- (i) Awareness on Malnutrition issues, (ii) Declining Sex ratio and (iii) Empowerment of Adolescent Girls. All these themes are extremely relevant and concern both women and children and, especially, the girl child. The declining child sex-ratio (0-6 years) brought out by Census, 2011 is a matter of great concern. The number of girls per 1000 boys has come down further to 914 from 927 in Census 2001. This ratio is an indicator of the mindset and it is worrying that the decline has taken place in 27 States and UTs across the country. Improving this ratio is not merely a question of stricter compliance with the existing laws but recognising the value to the girl child in our society.

4. Our girls and women have done us proud in classrooms, in boardrooms and on the sports field. They have broken barriers and proved their worth in almost every sphere, even in the field of rocket science, the Project-Director of the 3500 km new-generation Agni-IV missile programme happens to be a woman. Despite all this, it is indeed a shame for all of us that female foeticide is continuing in many parts of our country. This is a gross violation of human rights and violation of right to life as guaranteed under our constitution. The social bias against girl child must be fought with all the physical and moral resources at our command and a national campaign should be undertaken to counter this bias. I urge all of you in the Government or outside to lend your personal support to such a crusade.

5. Women constitute about half of our country's population. But there are gross inequities in their development. These disparities get reflected in important development indicators such as on health, nutrition, literacy, educational attainments, skill levels and in occupational status. In addition, there are a number of socio-cultural gender-specific barriers in India that prevent women from gaining access to the goods and services. Today, we are proud that we are one of the fastest growing economies in the world. But the real development will take root only when women are included and are mainstreamed into all economic, political and social activities. In other words, women must be empowered and the children must be given an enabling environment for growth and for realizing their potential to the full.

6. Government has taken the affirmative measures to have gender perspective in planning and budgetary process. In the Union Budget of 2004-05, the Government had mandated the setting up of **Gender Budgeting Cells** in all Departments. Fifty six Departments have these cells as of now. In 2010-11, 28 Ministries have prepared gender budgets amounting Rs.67,750 crore. I am glad that the gender-based allocations have been made by not only social sector Ministries like Health and Family Affair or HRD but also by so-called gender-neutral Ministries like Telecom, Information Technology and Science and Technology. Having said this, I must say, we must not become complacent about our endeavours towards the gender budgeting but take it forward and combine it with gender auditing of policies and programmes of Government Departments.

7. With more than a third of its population below the age of 18, India has the largest child population in the world. However our children continue to face challenges in terms of survival, protection and development. They are our richest human resource and their development is crucial to the welfare and development of the country. Over the last few years, the Government has been focusing on the development needs of children and women through a number of schemes. Among the most significant among these schemes are Integrated Child Development Services, Swayamsidha, Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls- SABLA, 'Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana' and Rashtriya Mahila Kosh's.

8. I feel that as responsible citizen of the country, each and every one of us has a duty towards building a fair, equitable and just environment for our women and children, to ensure 'inclusive growth' in real sense.

9. With these words, I once again congratulate the Ministry of Women and Child Development for organising such an event for furthering cause of women and children and spreading awareness amongst our citizenry.

Thank you
