

Speech by Shri Prithviraj Chavan, MOS(PP)
All India Conference of the Central Administrative Tribunals
New Delhi, 1 November, 2009

Hon'ble Shri Justice K.G.Balakrishnan, Chief Justice of India,
Hon'ble Justice Dr Mukundakam Sharma, Judge of the Supreme Court,
Dr. Veerappa Moily, Union Minister of Law & Justice,
Justice V. K. Bali, Chairman, Central Administrative Tribunal,
Justice M. Ramachandran, Vice Chairman, CAT,
Shri L.K. Joshi, Vice Chairman CAT,
Shri Shantanu Consul, Secretary, Dept of Personnel & Training,
Eminent Judges of the Supreme Court,
Distinguished Members of the CAT,
Ladies and gentlemen:

I extremely happy to be with you today on the occasion of the All India Conference of the Central Administrative Tribunals. I am happy to see that as we decided in the Conference held last year, All India Conference has now become a regular annual event to be held on the 1st of November each year, the day the CAT was set up in 1985, as result of the initiative by our former Prime Minister, Shri Rajiv Gandhi.

2. I am happy that Chief Justice Balakrishnan has agreed to inaugurate the Conference and deliver a Key Note address. His words of wisdom shall certainly enrich today's deliberations. I am also thankful to the Law Minister who had to reschedule his programme to be with us. We are eager to hear his views on Judicial Reforms. Dr. Justice Mukundakam Sharma has kindly agreed to speak on Service Law from his long personal experience in the area.

3. Last year, we decided that there should be an orientation programme for the newly appointed Members of the CAT. I am happy that the first batch of training was conducted early this year in April at the National Judicial Academy, Bhopal. I am sure the training was useful. We shall make the orientation of all new Members a regular feature.

4. Justice Bali talked about the fallout of the “L. Chandrakumar” judgement. It was also discussed in the last Conference. We have now received the Report of the Law Commission, titled “L. Chandrakumar be revisited by a larger Bench of the Supreme Court”. I have also discussed the matter with the Chairman CAT. The Law Commission Report is currently under active consideration of the Government. We will find ways which will help us to protect the original objective with which the Administrative Tribunals were conceived.

5. The Chairman CAT has raised the issue of increasing the jurisdiction of the CAT by bringing more organisations under its purview. Many new organisations have been added to the list of organisations already getting covered. So far we have brought 191 organisations within the ambit of the CAT. Naturally, more Government employees would be in a position to get speedy justice for their grievances. If we can fulfil the infrastructure needs of CAT, even the PSUs and the Public Sector Banking institutions could be covered.

6. The Government of India has always believed that the grievances of the employees should be sorted out in house so that the matters do not reach the level of litigation. The historic RTI Act, 2005 has brought great transparency in governance. We have seen a large number of service law related grievances now being addressed through a regime of open government. We are taking further step to improve the RTI law to strengthen it to increase proactive disclosure, so that most of the information except national security and personal privacy related information would be in the public domain.

7. However, in spite of all our efforts, there are some matters which reach the Courts. Since its inception, CAT has handled about 5.32 lakh cases. Out of which only about 23,000 are pending. However, we should see to it that these are attended to quickly and the number of pending cases are reduced further. The issue of pending cases was also brought up by the Members of Parliament during the deliberations of the Department Related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice held recently. I am sure that the Tribunals will see to it that cases pending for more than a year are liquidated soon.

8. On behalf of the Government I assure you that there will be a constant support for all the activities of the CAT. We have taken steps to fill up the vacancies in the CAT as soon as they arise. In fact, ever since the Act got amended, we have been able to fill up about 47 vacancies with highly qualified members in both the judicial as well as the administrative streams in the CAT. The impact of the amendment to the Administrative Tribunal Act carried out in 2006, has gradually started yielding results. All these measures will surely strengthen the organisation and enhance the quality of judgements. Then there is the issue about the physical infrastructure. We will support construction of modern office space wherever land available. CAT is already making good use of Information Technology. We will support further upgradation.

9. Under the Administrative Tribunal Act 1985, some State have set up State Administrative Tribunals. These are functioning in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Orissa and West Bengal. Since these Tribunals have also been set up under the same Act and are doing exactly similar kind of work in the States, it would be good to have a synergy with the State Administrative Tribunals so that the best practices could be shared. In fact, Members of the State Administrative Tribunals could also be called for such Conferences so that there is greater sharing of ideas and viewpoints.

10. The CAT has been functioning effectively since 1985. In fact, from today onwards, CAT would enter the 25th year of its functioning. Year 2010 would be the Silver Jubilee year of the CAT. As an organisation, CAT has grown successfully over the years and has given justice to innumerable government employees. The organisation is entering the 25th year of its existence and the Silver Jubilee celebrations will begin from midnight. Perhaps we could start an annual Rajiv Gandhi memorial lecture by an international expert on Service Law. I wish the organisation the very best in the years to come.

11. I hope that there will be a fruitful discussion during the course of the day. I assure you that and the recommendations of the Conference will be considered in all seriousness. Thank You.