Pratibha Patil is India's first woman President

Pratibha Devisingh Patil made history as she took oath as India's first woman President on July 25, committing herself to work for the well-being of its citizens and setting an agenda for the nation on issues such as women's empowerment, modern education and inclusive growth.

Chief Justice of India K.G. Balakrishnan administered the oath of office and secrecy to the 72-year-old Patil, who barely two months ago, may not have even dreamt that she was going to occupy the top post that would make her preside over the affairs of the world's largest democracy.

Patil symbolically exchanged the presidential seat with outgoing president A.P.J. Abdul Kalam as a 21-gun salute boomed to announce the installation of the nation's 12th president.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Lok Sabha Speaker Somnath Chatterjee, Leader of Opposition L.K. Advani, United Progressive Alliance (UPA) chairperson Sonia Gandhi and senior cabinet ministers, governors and MPs attended the function.

The ceremony, at the majestic Central Hall of Parliament House, was also attended by two former prime ministers, Atal Bihari Vajpayee and I.K. Gujral, and dozens of foreign diplomats.

Also present were Patil's family members, including her husband Devisingh Ransingh Shekhawat as well as her daughter and son with their families.

The ceremony began with both Patil and Kalam, escorted by Chatterjee, coming into the chamber in a procession after the outgoing and incoming presidents had come in a ceremonial motorcade from Rashtrapati Bhavan, the grand 340-room presidential palace that will be Patil's home for the next five years.

This was followed by Home Secretary Madhukar Gupta reading out the communication from the Election Commission about the election of the new president.

Pratibha Patil won the July 19 election against former vice president Bhairon Singh Shekhawat.

In her speech, delivered both in English and Hindi, Patil demanded "socially inclusive" economic growth and hit out at "communalism" as she made her maiden political statement.

She in some ways set an agenda for the nation, talking about the need to empower women, introduce modern education in areas that don't have them, inculcate scientific temper and stressed on the need for greater



Chief Justice of India K. G. Balakrishnan administering the oath of office to new President Pratibha Patil.

Pratibha Patil's profile

Pratibha Devisingh Patil, born on December 19, 1934, is the 12th President of India. She is the first woman and the first Maharashtrian to hold this post. Patil, a member of the Indian National Congress, was nominated by the ruling United Progressive Alliance and Indian Left. A trained lawyer, Patil represented Edlabad constituency in Jalgaon district as a member of the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly (1962-1985) before becoming deputy chairperson of the Rajya Sabha (1986-1988). She was a Member of Parliament for Amravati in the Lok Sabha (1991-1996).

Patil received her M.A. from Mooljee Jaitha (M.J.) College, Jalgaon, and obtained a law degree from the Government Law College, Mumbai. She began her political career in 1962 at the age of 27. She became a deputy minister for education after reelection in 1967 (in Chief Minister Vasantrao Naik's ministry).

In 1985, she was elected to the Rajya Sabha, and served as its deputy chairperson from November 1986 to November 1988.

In November 2004, Pratibha Patil was appointed the Governor of Rajasthan. She was the first woman Governor of Rajasthan. With Pratibha Patil as Governor, Rajasthan had women in three significant positions of power in the state, including Chief Minister Vasundhara Raje and Assembly Speaker Sumitra Singh.

development of science and technology and the necessity of balanced development.

"It should be our combined endeavour to sustain (economic) growth and ensure that it is socially inclusive. We must ensure that every section of our society — particularly the weak and the disadvantaged — are equal partners in, and beneficiaries of the development process."

In a tacit admission that her journey to Rashtrapati Bhavan has been sudden and unexpected, she said: "I am fully aware of the great responsibilities placed on my humble shoulders."

Calling India "an ancient civilisation but a young nation", she said: "We must all stand united in the fight against such divisive and destructive tendencies as communalism, casteism, extremism and terrorism."

The new President placed emphasis on the spread of education.

"To realise the full potential of our people, we must invest in their capabilities and empower them with modern education and comprehensive health care.

"We must banish malnutrition, social evils infant mortality and female foeticide. I wish to express my full commitment to the protection of child rights," she said.

Patil stressed the need to protect the planet and the environment.

"I am deeply committed to the cause of education and would like to see every person, man and woman... be touched by the light of modern education. Empowerment of women is particularly important to me as I believe this leads to the empowerment of the nation."