**ADDRESS BY THE HON'BLE PRESIDENT OF INDIA
SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND ON THE OCCASION OF
PRESENTATION OF DIGITAL INDIA AWARDS (DIA) 2020**

It gives me immense pleasure to address you on the occasion of the sixth Digital India Awards ceremony. The awards have been instituted to honour exemplary initiatives undertaken by government entities in promoting Digital Governance. The Digital India Awards reflect the overall vision of the government to empower citizens to achieve their aspirations and make India a digital superpower.

The year 2020 has been the year of Covid-19. The year is about to end now, and let us hope the pandemic will also end soon. It will not be an overstatement to say that the Coronavirus has changed the world in terms of social relations, economic activities, health care, education and several other aspects of life. Yet, life has not come to a standstill – thanks largely to information and communication technology. Technological advances are often termed as 'disruptions', but this year they helped us overcome the big disruption to a great extent.

India was not only prepared to minimise the adverse impact of mobility-restrictions, but also utilized the crisis as an opportunity to march ahead in various arenas. It was possible only because the digital infrastructure has been strengthened in recent years. Education continued without a break as most institutions started offering lessons online. From the judiciary to tele-medicine, scores of sectors switched to the virtual mode. For the government too, information technology was one of the most crucial tools to deliver a variety of services to citizens and keep the wheels of the economy turning.

One significant step in our lives due to robust ICT penetration is the digital inclusion. This digital inclusion has touched our lives in most simple ways as payments through internet, internet banking or as simple as Unified Payment Interface or UPI as it is popularly known. No one had thought that payments or transferring money could be as simple as a touch on a smart phone. Such revolutionary changes are taking us towards an empowered and knowledge society.

Ladies and Gentlemen,
I am glad that a new category was added this year for the Digital India Awards to honour best efforts in 'Innovation in Pandemic'. Even more heartening is the fact that the number of nominations received under this category is the highest. This shows the eagerness and enthusiasm of the leadership of various public organisations in making the best use of technology to offer a helping hand to people in these extraordinary times.

Another new category introduced this year, Exemplary Product award is given for initiatives that are well established and accorded flagship status due to their scale, maturity and nationwide implementation. Achievers in areas as varied as pandemic, district information, land resources and temple management have received laurels in the form of these awards.

Due to proactive digital interventions, we have been able to ensure operational continuity of important government services during and after the lockdown. Equally importantly, they have helped us in pandemic management too. The role of our digital warriors has been commendable in helping the country overcome challenges posed by the pandemic. Proactive implementation of platforms such as Arogya Setu, e-Office and video conferencing services backed by a robust ICT infrastructure has helped the country reduce the pandemic hardships.

Indeed, the entire process of the Digital India Awards, from nominations to selection and finally conferring the honours today has been conducted online. I compliment the National Informatics Centre for successfully executing Digital India Awards 2020 and playing a pivotal role in accelerating the cause of Digital India at all levels of governance. The NIC is the torch-bearer of e-governance and digital transformation in the country. It has been running many technology-driven initiatives for making interaction between the government and citizens seamless and hassle-free. The underlying foundation for all these initiatives is the strong ICT infrastructure.

Ladies and Gentlemen,
We must keep exploring innovative solutions for the functioning of government offices in paperless and contactless mode for security and benefit of every citizen. It will also help in making administrative processes more eco-friendly. We must leverage technology and ICT-driven innovative

solutions to aid economic inclusiveness and social transformation even in the remotest corners of our country. A large segment of our population is still not able to derive the benefits of digital devices and services. The number of such people needs to be minimised by extending digital access to them through effective innovations. This will make our digital revolution more inclusive. Thus, the Digital India initiative of the Government should continue to strive towards reducing the digital divide.

Information, it is said, is power. Sharing more information with more people not only enhances transparency in society, but also empowers citizens and civil society. With this noble ideal in mind, the government has started putting different kinds of data sets and data resources in the public domain. This is highly necessary for an informed citizenship, which is the cornerstone of democracy. The National Data Sharing and Accessibility Policy too envisages a participatory model of governance in which citizens can access non-strategic information from public authorities and become partners with the government in various reform processes. Thus, I am happy to learn that one of the six categories for Digital India Awards is dedicated to Open Data Championship.

Indigenous plug-and-play ICT solutions are required for the efficient, transparent and quick delivery of governance at different levels, from the Union Government to the local governance bodies. As Covid-19 has impacted the global economy, we have pledged to make India more self-reliant, that is, Atma Nirbhar. And technology is going to be a key enabler in that journey in the days to come.

India has been at the forefront in implementing and adopting modern technologies in different sectors and at all levels of governance. We have to keep challenging ourselves to deliver innovative solutions to improve the ease of living for all citizens.

Many of such solution-providers have made it to the winners list this year. These 24 awardees across 7 categories have brought about changes at district, state and national levels. My Congratulations to the winners of the Digital India Awards! The jury members should also be commended for upholding high standards of selection processes and rewarding benchmark-performances. I extend my compliments to all those who are adding the ICT advantage to the development story of the country. I expect all the

participants to keep evolving and creating new ways of providing citizen-centric services through digital governance.

I wish that the indomitable spirit of India and its citizens keeps shining bright, and may we continue to join hands together to keep growing stronger as a nation.

Jai Hind!