

I greet you all on the occasion of the 46th anniversary of our Independence Day and, on this auspicious occasion, I congratulate you and extend to you my hearty felicitations.

As you know, we celebrated the Golden Jubilee of the Quit India Movement, a few days ago. This Movement was the most decisive part of our struggle for independence and within five years of this Movement we achieved our independence. Many freedom fighters who made great sacrifices for the freedom, are fortunately with us and many of them are no more. We are grateful to all of them. The nation will never forget them and their names will be there in the history of India for ever.

Today, on 15th August, we are making a new beginning in the technological field. Till now, Doordarshan had only two channels. But from today, you will have six channels on Doordarshan. This is no small achievement. At the most one or two channels could have been added but our scientists have performed a miracle in space. The INSAT-2B satellite designed and fabricated by our scientists has been stationed in the geocentric orbit and it is working quite perfectly. Consequently, from today you have got six channels and gradually you will have more channels on the Doordarshan. This satellite is one of the examples of our self-reliance in the realm of science and technology.

Here I would also like to tell you something that relates to our national resolve. We needed an engine called cryogenic engine for the satellite. There is no difficulty in buying the engine but some difficulty is there in the transfer of technology. There are many reasons behind it but there is no need to go into them now. We were to get this technology from Russia but now there is a question mark on it. Then, what do we do? Should we give up our programme? Definitely not. We have decided and our scientists have assured us that within two years they will develop the same technology indigenously and after that there would be no difficulty in designing, manufacturing and launching such satellites. The scientists have asked for two years time and till then we can purchase these engines and our satellite programme would continue without any hindrance.

This day is very memorable for us. On this day we take stock of situation, dwell on our past and think of future. Let us look at the achievements of the Government and people of India during the last two years. I would like to tell you briefly. It is not that you do not know about them but still I would like to recall them. First let us have a look at our economy. You have to make a comparison of the present state of economy with the one which this Government inherited from the previous Governments. The extent of progress we have made in two years is a miracle in itself. This proves that our economic system was good, the infrastructure was basically sound, but because it was distorted for one or two years, it went haywire. After this, we started mending it and it recovered quickly. Therefore, there is no need to be pessimistic. The foundation of this economic system, laid by our leaders during the last forty years, is still very strong and it could steadily move forward only if the system is allowed to grow without any obstruction or attempt at distorting it.

You must have been reading about the inflation, which has today come down to 5 percent from 17 percent within less than two years. What does it mean? It means that fluctuations in prices as prevailed in some other countries do not exist in our country and it shall never be so. Prices have been controlled in a manner that whatever fluctuations there may be, it would always be within our control. You must have noticed that increase or decrease in prices in a year have remained confined within a small range and have never gone beyond it. This is an indication of the strength of our economy.

Today, you have to take one more thing into consideration. It is the amount of money that we received as deposits from outside. You may ask what was the need for it. This is required because we need foreign exchange. We have to import kerosene, fertilizers, machinery and we need foreign exchange to bring all these from abroad.

When this Government came to power, we had only about 2000 to 2400 crore rupees in foreign exchange reserve. It was going to be exhausted within a week. I am happy to state that today, we have Rs.

21000 crore, i.e., 7 billion dollars. Today, if you have to import from anywhere, you would have no problem. Our foreign exchange position is very good. It is in such conditions that we are able to march forward with self-confidence and we are forging ahead.

The growth of the economy is also satisfactory. And the trade balance, i.e. how much we export and how much we import is very important. If you import too much from outside, your foreign exchange reserves would deplete and get exhausted, but when you export more and import less, there will be a favourable balance between the two. I am very happy to say that for the first time in the history of free India, we have achieved the trade balance. Earlier we used to import more and export less. Now, both of these have come to an equal level and, for the first time, we have a very comfortable position. So we will not be required to touch the foreign exchange reserves that we have. The money we get from our exports shall be used for imports and this will keep up the trade balance,

Whatever programmes we have taken up, are mostly for the poor. Today, a comment, an irresponsible comment, is made that all the programmes formulated by this Government are for the rich. Nothing can be farther from the truth. In fact, all our programmes are for the poor. We have made enormous increase in the Jawahar Rozgar Yojana and rural development. If we look at this year's budget, the increase in allocations for the programmes for rural development, education and health and many other schemes which directly benefit the poor and the rural population, no one can say that these programmes are for the affluent section of the society only.

Of course, I must say, for industrialisation we don't have adequate resources. Ours is a poor country and the preceding Governments made it poorer. Today, what we need is capital investment. If this is not done, our industry will not grow. If the industry does not grow, there would be unemployment, and in the absence of employment, there would be starvation, unrest and the country would disintegrate. Hence, the most important thing is to improve our economy. For this we need to launch a

gigantic program of industrialisation and we have done so.

I am happy to say that last year our industrialisation programme progressed smoothly for about eight months, but after 6 December, and the bomb blasts in Bombay, it received a setback and slowed down. This happens. If law and order or peace in the country is threatened, why should the people from outside come here, even if they are our own people, and invest their money? It became apparent that after the good record of eight months, their enthusiasm got dampened. But, on the whole, our industrialisation programme is progressing well. Today, the country has about 10,000 proposals for setting up small and big projects and they are about to be set up.

While marching towards industrialisation, we have taken steps to ensure that our workers do not suffer in any way. We have created a separate fund for them with an amount of about 2,000 crore rupees. The workers shall be helped with this money. They won't be allowed to remain without job. The money will be provided to them from this fund for training to redeploy them in any other job and care will be taken about their future.

Now, I come to agriculture. It is a matter of great pride for us that this year's agricultural production has crossed all records of the past 40 years. We have increased our production to this level and I, on behalf of the people, the country, and on behalf of the Government of India, would like to congratulate and felicitate the farmers of the country. Of course, farmer is the "Annadata" but today he is also our exporter. For the first time, we are exporting our agricultural produce and this export can be on very large scale and we want to extend all support to this venture. The New Agricultural Policy lays great emphasis on the export of agricultural products. It will require more investments and more capital. We want to invest more on irrigation because the more we invest, the higher will be the yield. India is among the very few nations of the world which can produce enough not only for feeding its own people but also for export. We have to maintain this tempo. We have to give maximum benefit to our farmers.

In the last two years, you have noticed, the support prices that we

give to the farmers have been going up. For instance, the support price of wheat has been enhanced by Rs. 55 per quintal and gram by Rs. 100. We have also raised the support price of different varieties of paddy between Rs. 40 and Rs. 60 per quintal.

Have you or any farmer ever heard of an increase of such a magnitude in the support price? There was a time when it was difficult to give an increase of one or two rupees in the support price. At present, we are giving these higher support prices because the expenditure of farmer has also increased. It is not a charity nor any obligation. Rather, the farmer is obliging us. We are only cooperating with and supporting him. Therefore, we should fix a reasonable price and should not hesitate to pay that. If we were to import foodgrains, we would have realised our burden and our consequent expenditure. The farmer is saving a lot of foreign exchange for us. Once again, I would like to congratulate the farmer.

Another programme in the field of agriculture is that of crop insurance. This programme existed earlier also, but had some lacunae in it. It was thought to prepare a pilot scheme to be implemented next year. It would cover the farmers and include all the crops. First we would implement the scheme on pilot basis in one district of each State. When this programme is extended to the whole country, the farmer would have no worry about the fate of his crops in the event of excessive rains, hailstorms, and drought. If the crop insurance programme runs well, the farmer would not have to worry about these natural calamities.

It is well known that we have helped the farmers a lot in so far as fertilizers are concerned. We are giving them assistance of Rs. 1,000 per tonne. DAP and other fertilizers were available at cheaper rates in foreign countries as compared to the rates of indigenous fertilizers. We, therefore, moved swiftly to import them. The difference in prices of indigenously produced and the imported fertilizers ranged between Rs. 2,000 to Rs. 2,500 per tonne. We have imported fertilizers for the whole year. Today, I would like to assure the farmers that they will have no worry about the continuous availability of fertilizer for a year. Whatever they want, and in

whatever quantity, is available in our country. There are some factories which have become unviable, the costs of their production have started increasing. So we have given them many more facilities and made them viable. At present, they are also engaged in the production.

Now I would like to tell you a few things about the rural development. You have heard about the outlay of Rs. 30,000 crore on rural development and this money is being used for the schemes which benefit the rural people directly.

You may recall that last year I had announced a programme for artisans. There are lots of craftsmen and artisans in our villages but their tools are very old. These may be as old as 100 to 200 years. They work with these obsolete tools; hence their productivity is restricted. We had declared that modern tools would be provided to all the rural craftsmen of the country and we would take up a massive programme for providing them. I am happy to say that we had taken up 62 districts last year and 100 more districts this year and by the end of current Five Year Plan, we would be implementing this programme throughout the country.

The programme has proved beneficial. More than 1 to 1.5 lakh artisans have benefitted from this scheme and their productivity enhanced, so much so, some of the people who had left their hearth and home for the cities ultimately returned to the villages, for now they can earn the same amount of money sitting in their homes in the village itself. So why should they go to the cities? This is happening silently without any pomp or show. In villages, the artisan is being convinced that new tool kits are beneficial to him and artisans are profiting from this. This programme is not to be left half-way. The programme will go on during the entire Plan period until each one of our artisans starts working with improved tools. In a way, this will bring about a revolution in the lives of artisans.

You are aware that a massive programme for the supply of drinking water has been taken up. Almost all the villages known as revenue villages have been covered. But every village also has small hamlets. Now these hamlets have to be covered because even if there are three-four hamlets or

even 10 families, they also need water and their requirement is to be met. One cannot say that since there are only a few people over there, they would not require water. Everybody needs water. So to provide drinking water to all, a massive programme is going on under the Rural Development Department.

Now, the Panchayati Raj. After four years of intensive efforts, overcoming obstacles, we have recently passed the Panchayati Raj Bill in Parliament and State governments have also passed it in their Assemblies. It has now become an Act. Within a year the country shall have a new structure of Panchayati Raj wherein the people's power will find expression. The power which was vested in them but suppressed, will emerge and you will see that the Panchayat will take up impressive programmes of development. India shall witness a new enthusiasm and massive programme of development.

I would like to tell my sisters, that when the new Panchayat is constituted, it will have thirty per cent women members in it. You should be prepared for shouldering such a heavy responsibility. Till now there used to be few women in the Panchayat and they could not participate actively but now the women will have to participate more actively in the Panchayats. They will have to take over the work assigned to them. The reservation for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes already exists and will be maintained in proportion to their population.

Last year, I had announced that we would form a Commission for the Safai Karmacharis. I am happy to announce that we have decided to form not just a Commission, but a statutory Commission. The Bill to this effect is already before Parliament for consideration. In the next few days it will be passed by Parliament. Safai Karmacharis belong to the backward community. Their uplift is a must and we would not spare any effort to do it.

We are determined to eliminate the practice of carrying human excreta on head which is still in vogue in some of our cities and small towns. To eliminate the practice, we have made a provision of Rs. 111 crore this year. We would make every effort to provide Safai Karmacharis

with alternative employment. Once a Commission is formed, it will look into their problems and evolve measures to solve them. I want to assure our brethren that the Commission's recommendations will receive full attention from the Government.

You might be aware of the constitution of the National Backward Class Financial Development Corporation. The Corporation has done a good job. It has given loans to 25,000 people and has arranged for their livelihood within a short span of one year. In the same way thousands more will benefit from this Corporation.

I also want to tell our weavers that for the first time, a change in their life is awaiting them. So far, they were never included in the schemes for the rural development. For the first time now, the weavers have been included in these schemes currently being implemented in the rural areas. They will be given looms, working sheds and working capital and for this a sum of Rs. 525 crore has been earmarked.

Now with this new programme, the weavers have a new hope for a better life. I want to congratulate them on this occasion and would like to tell them to take full advantage of these facilities.

In the meanwhile, there was drought in many States and floods in some others. In fact, the situation was such that in the same State, in one part there was drought, while in the other part, there were floods. I visited some of these States. We gave them timely help to provide relief to the affected people to the extent possible.

Floods are a recurring phenomenon. They visit us every year. Relief is provided. After the floods recede, all is forgotten till the next flood. This is not proper. We have to think of some permanent solution to control the floods. We will take all aspects into consideration. This task cannot be completed in a short time. It may take years. But we have to make a beginning somewhere. I assure you that we would initiate action on this, whether it is in Bihar or Uttar Pradesh or any other State. Otherwise the curse of floods will always haunt our country.



Brothers, now I want to tell you about some new schemes and make some announcements. In the last few days, we have taken stock of several schemes which are continuing in the country, but we will also have to introduce some new schemes and implement them.

The first scheme relates to our sisters, especially those living in the rural areas. The present plight of the women is well known to everybody. This situation needs improvement. Some of us are of the view that if the women are self-reliant in financial matters, they will be able to hold their heads high. A woman should get a status in the society. Her role should not be confined to routine household work but she should be made an important constituent of the society, which is called empowerment. And today, we have to take up the programme of empowering the women. It is a very important thing but it looks as though it would take a lot of time. Every adult woman of the country should have an account of her own in a bank or in a post office wherever possible so that she can get the status of an account holder.

She should have the freedom of operating her account independently as others do. And she should be able to deposit or withdraw the money from that account, whether it is an amount of Rs. 100, Rs. 50 or even Rs. 30. Therefore, we have taken up this scheme which involves a Government expenditure of Rs. 1,000 crore. A woman who opens a savings account and deposits Rs. 300 within a year, the Government will give her Rs. 75 and she will be getting Rs. 375 after a year. All this money will be hers. We do not want to take anything from her, rather, we want to give Rs. 75 from our side. The Government will be incurring a loss on this scheme, but I am sure the kind of self-confidence that it will generate in women is priceless. Nobody can assess the value of that self-confidence. Now that they are poised to shoulder the bigger responsibilities in Panchayat system, they should know at least what is an account. Today, how many women are there in the rural society who have their own independent account? There must be very few, I guess. Tomorrow when crores of such accounts are opened, it would usher in a new revolution in the world of women. I want to

reiterate my determination to implement this programme.

There are several voluntary organisations. Mahila Mandals as in the villages. I want to appeal to them to help our women to run this programme which the Government has decided to implement by incurring a large expenditure. These organisations need to provide their help only for one year. Thereafter our womenfolk will then learn about this and will not seek their help. We must take up programme because it generates a new attitude.

An employment programme is currently going on in Maharashtra, Karnataka etc. Our entire scheme is also employment oriented and we have to see how maximum number of people could be given employment. In the rural areas, people get employment during the agricultural season but during the course of the year there are at least 100 days, which are called lean days when there is not much agricultural activity. People remain idle. We have decided to provide them employment during these 100 days. Though it may not be guaranteed, but I assure them that those who are ready to work will get work as is being done in Karnataka and Maharashtra at present. We want to adopt this scheme throughout the country. Though the Jawahar Rozgar Yojana and other schemes are already there, the main purpose of this scheme is to provide assured employment to those who are unemployed. As I have announced last year, we want to implement this programme in all 1,700 backward blocks in the country where the poorest of the poor live and which are situated in the hilly, desert or the tribal areas. The work will start in those blocks because maximum number of unemployed persons are there and people do not even get a square meal a day. Later it will be extended to cover the entire country.

The third programme is for our semi-educated youth who do not get employment. Educated unemployed such as matriculates or undermatrics, do not get work because perhaps their qualification is inadequate, or because there is no ready employment. For them, we have envisaged a scheme under which they can start their own small enterprises. Thousands of occupations, such as opening of shops, require only a little training for

our youth. They do not require any high qualifications. We want to give employment to such people. If two people start any joint enterprise, the Government would provide them Rs. one lakh as loan. Of this amount of Rs. one lakh, Rs. 7,500 will be subsidy. We will provide training and other facilities to run the *enterprise*. We think that within the remaining three years of the present Five Year Plan, we can provide such jobs to 10 lakh youths of the country. We have made financial provision for this scheme. We are announcing these three new schemes today because, we think that these programmes can be completed during the remaining three years.

Now, I will turn to political scenario. As far as Punjab is concerned, I have already said and you also know that there is now complete peace. If someone asks which is the most peaceful State in the country today, the answer will be Punjab. This is the same Punjab which had been bleeding for the last 12 years. This is a matter of pride for the people and the Government of Punjab, who have made it all

Possible.

It is also a matter of pride for the men of our armed forces and police who grappled with the terrorists and controlled them. On behalf of the nation, I extend the heartiest felicitation to them all. Punjab is our granary. If there is any disturbance there, it will affect the entire country. But kudos to the people of Punjab who made this miracle possible and maintained the agricultural production and did not allow it to slide down from its number one position when the State was bleeding. This is a matter of great pride. I want to congratulate them again. Now Punjab is poised for an industrial revolution. All ground work has been done. You will see that in the next two-three years, there will be an industrial revolution along with the Green Revolution.

The situation in Kashmir has not improved as yet. There is only a marginal improvement but we still have to do a lot. In Kashmir, the incitement, money and weapons and trained people come from Pakistan. The trouble is not from within Kashmir but it comes from across the border. People of Kashmir are against terrorism. This, I can state with full

confidence. But when they face bullets, they are naturally scared. Though people do not say it, but if terrorism comes to an end, they will be very happy and heave a sigh of relief. There is no doubt about it. While Pakistan is carrying out false propaganda about human rights violation in J. & K. only two days ago the terrorists from that country stopped a bus midway and pulled out 16 or 17 people and shot them dead. Do they mean that those who have been the victims of their bullets have no human rights? Have they no right to live? Only when the terrorists get killed in encounters, why do these people get perturbed, why do they campaign for upholding the human rights? Do only the terrorists have human rights? They have a right to kill others and they also have human rights to the effect that nobody should kill them. This is a warped logic beyond comprehension and we are not prepared to accept it. I would like to congratulate those who fought against terrorism and caught many terrorists and have tried to bring the situation somewhat under control. This process will continue. Pakistan may do whatever it wants, but Kashmir is an inalienable part of India. Nobody can separate it from India, whatever means they may use. Recently, Pakistan had reached where it would have been declared a terrorist state. Now when they provide weapons and other material for promoting terrorism, whom they are harming? I would like to appeal to them and also warn them that this plan will benefit no one of them in any case. India will remain unmoved from its position that Kashmir will remain an integral part of India and we will always serve the people of Kashmir in every possible manner and solve their problems. Nothing can be achieved from this bloodshed.

Issues have come up about Assam, Bodoland and recently Jharkhand. Certain problems are considered by locals as a matter of life and death because when a movement is carried on for a long time without any result, one feels bad. One becomes irritated and loses self-control. Assam problem has been solved. Bodoland problem has been solved and the matter relating to Jharkhand will also be resolved shortly. We should, therefore, not get impatient. There is no need to get excited and lose one's

temper. This is a message, I have for them.

In so far as Ayodhya is concerned, I was hesitant to comment on the issue. But it is necessary to say that there has been such destruction that has tarnished India's image. Abroad. India's image looks sullied. We appear to be destructive. We have been known as a peace loving nation for the past 5000 years. Now the opinion all over the world about us has undergone a change and people are wondering how we have given in to violence. We are not covered with more glory. On the contrary, we have been defamed. People have started doubting our cultural traditions and our peace loving nature. I would say that no condemnation of this disrespectful act will be adequate. But the irony is that this act is being projected as praiseworthy. If somebody goes abroad to project the demolition as a good act, this further spoils our image.

I want to emphasise that it is not a good move. Within a short span of time, it would be clear as to who was responsible for this. It will also be known as to how it was done, who did it and who were behind it.

Today, I want to tell you that only one motive is working behind these things. It has become a habit to misuse religion for political purposes. Politics is a good thing, so is religion. Without religion, there is no direction, one becomes confused. Religion, whichever it may be, is meant for guiding our lives to the right path. Politics shows the way for the organisation of society and the organisation of the state. Religion and politics both have their rightful places in their appointed spheres. But when both are mixed and religion is used for political purposes, religion does not remain religion, it takes the shape of communalism. We have to stand unitedly and fight against communalism. It includes the government and the people. No sacrifice is too big for it. For the past few years, communalism is raising its head and if this situation is allowed to continue, there will be no future for our country and the nation will fall apart. Once it is accepted that one religion is superior and another is inferior, one is good and the other is bad, then there will be no unity in this country, no integrity. The nation will disintegrate. It is not mentioned in any religion to hate or to look down upon

other religions. All are equal. Whether it is a majority or a minority in our country, all are equal under our Constitution. Whatever the number, even the miniscule has the same rights that are enjoyed by the majority. That is why we have to assert that any such discrimination will not work in this country, and shall not be tolerated. You have also to assert that whosoever violates the Constitution, cannot do it for all time to come. One may do it for one or two days, in one election or two elections, but soon people will understand and will teach such violaters a lesson. I want to impress that we have to get rid of these things. Religion should be kept separate from politics. We have to give importance to both. Follow your religion, nobody has any objection. Go and work for your respective parties, give details of your programmes to the people, get votes and rule. Nobody has any objection. But, no one has a right to ask for votes in the name of Hindu or Islam or Christianity. No one has a right to exploit the sentiments of the people, by creating a frenzy fundamentalism. This should never be allowed to happen, this is my appeal to you.

Secularism is our life breath. The moment it stops, our breath will cease, nation's breath will cease. The Government is making efforts to preserve our secular character. A Bill has been brought before Parliament which prohibits the use of religion in politics. However, law alone is not enough.

There is a need for spreading awareness among the masses about the dangers of using religion in politics. Each and everyone should be made aware of this. I want to stress that whatever we are doing should be supplemented by you. All of us have to work together for its success.

I was speaking of destruction. How do we react to destruction? Destruction cannot be countered with destruction. If somebody brings down a structure, the response cannot be the destruction of something else. Whatever has been demolished, will have to be built, rebuilt. No one knows how many cities had been destroyed during the last World War. Hundreds of cities were razed to the ground. London was afire and half of it was destroyed. But nobody despaired. Each and every building destroyed was

reconstructed after the Great War; so also destroyed cities were reconstructed; half of London which was destroyed was rebuilt; in a better manner than the earlier ones. Today, we should not kneel down before these destructive forces and particularly, the destruction in Ayodhya. We will not accept defeat and will respond to the destruction by reconstruction. I not only assure you of this but also call upon all of you to come forward. If we work unitedly, the recent past of Ayodhya, which has left a scar in the hearts of the people will disappear. Only then will we be able to make secularism a success in this country.

As regards foreign affairs, you are aware that India has been very active during the past two years. We are hosting in our country a meeting of G-15, a forum of developing countries. There are a number of programmes that developing countries have to undertake. In the competition between North and South, India has always been playing an excellent role on behalf of developing countries.

I hope India will succeed in her efforts and developing countries will continue to march forward and achieve prosperity. Their programmes for development will be successfully implemented.

New complaints, disputes and controversies are developing today in the sphere of environment. They need to be solved. Not through confrontation but through discussions and dialogues, because through confrontation we would not succeed. Gone are the days when there were two power blocs. They used to quarrel some times directly: at other times by provoking groups having allegiance to them and instigating the latter to indulge in small skirmishes. Now the situation has changed. In the new situation we have to move forward through our reasoning and strong will. If you have a strong will, you will succeed.

Our relations with the neighbouring countries, except Pakistan, are good. We can have good relations with Pakistan too. I have met the Pakistan Prime Minister about half a dozen times. Our personal relations are very cordial but when it comes to matters of policy, it is difficult to say anything. Elections are going to be held shortly in Pakistan and a new

leadership will take over. I hope the new leadership will come with greater sense of realism and will have the courage to accept the reality and then alone could there be further and meaningful dialogue between us.

There need be no doubt on this. We are ready for talks, but one thing is clear, Kashmir is an indivisible part of India. It has been and will remain so. If this reality is accepted, there will be friendship and cooperation. I want to give this assurance. I want to give the same assurance to Pakistan, our neighbour and that it should forget about making efforts to separate Kashmir from India. That efforts have been made time and again and campaigning and spending have been going on. But now Pakistan must forget this. We can remain good friends forever on this basis and our friendship will serve as a model to the world.

Friends, I have taken much of your time. Today, whatever we are doing, we are doing for millions of our poor brothers and sisters. There are elements who are attempting to disturb our economic reforms by saying that money is being brought from outside, why it is being brought and on what will it be spent?

Whatever may be the source of money, it will be used to set up industry in India. The investor will not take away the industry to his country. He will construct railways, roads. I have already stated whatever infrastructure is created, it will remain with us. Now, the foreign investor may remain for whatever time in the country. Later he may like to go away. Structures raised by him will belong to the country. At the most, we have to pay him. They are welcome to join hands with us in the development of India as they are doing in other countries. They are welcome and millions of our people will be benefited and we are determined to achieve this. I am not satisfied with 30,000 crore rupees. Had it been 50,000 crores or more, I would have been happier. Had it been one lakh crore rupees it would have made me still happier. But we don't have that sort of money. We will do whatever we can.

So many civilizations have spread from India. India has been the birthplace of many civilizations. Today, we have to save ourselves from the



doubts in the minds of people regarding our civilization, our culture and our peace-loving nature. Otherwise, our glory, our image and our structure will be adversely affected and it will be very difficult to regain them. One more thing I want to say. If our attention is diverted from our economic programmes even for a month, then it would lead to severe economic loss. One should appreciate this. There were bomb blasts in Bombay. Our Finance Ministry says that on conservative estimates within a span of one or two months, we suffered a loss of about ten thousand crore rupees. In two months, if we suffer a loss of ten thousand crore rupees just because some mad person throws a bomb, what does it mean? In such a big country, will we allow one or three bombs to put the economy in disarray? How will we work? We will just not permit this to happen.

We do not tolerate any bomb blast. Wherever it occurs, I assure you, it would be dealt with. Preventive measures will be taken and those involved will be punished. But if such an incident does occur once in a while, why should it divert our attention from the path of economic progress? We want to move towards one direction only and it is the direction of economic progress. We are already lagging behind. Many smaller countries have gone much ahead of us. In case, for another two or three years, we get bogged down with Hindu Muslim riots, caste disputes and political and religious conflicts, and do not pay single-minded attention to economic progress, then our future will be bleak. This is the warning, we are receiving from all over the world. Our wisdom is also sounding a note of warning. Whether we listen to the voice of sanity or not, it is up to us. I would say, we must listen to it. I will give you an example from an Upanishad. There is a dancer. She is dancing while the musical instruments are being played and songs are being sung. She has a pitcher on her head. She would not allow the pitcher to fall, dance she must, her whole body would sway, but the pitcher would remain on her head. Maulistha Kumbha Parirakshana Dhiranativa. This is what our attitude should be. Let there be any calamity: let us be involved in any other activity; but the pitcher of development placed on our head, the pitcher of advancement, the pitcher of economic programmes that pitcher should

never be allowed to topple down. This caution is a must for us. If we are cautious enough to keep moving forward, there will be no problem for us.

In the comity of nations, India has taken her appropriate place and we will continue to strive to improve our position. Many opportunities are awaiting us. Soon the Security Council will be expanded. The UN has a number of programmes in which we have to play a greater role. We have always been active there. Wherever there has been a dispute, people start looking towards India, for we are not in favour of aggravating differences. We are among those who are for peace. We ourselves are peace-loving people. Hence, we have an important place there. But a country which is not internally strong cannot be considered strong abroad. Therefore, I would like to say with due respect to you that whether we belong to the minority or majority or any other faith or are even atheist, it does not matter. This is a matter of individual faith. I have already stated that there would not be any discrimination in so far as minorities are concerned. They are in minority only in numbers, but from the point of view of citizenship they are equal. Everybody would enjoy the same rights. This is what I want to say. Today minorities feel insecure with regard to their life and property. Recent riots have increased this sense of insecurity; they are scared. In this context I would mention to you that the police force is there to keep law and order. In this force we have introduced battalions of Rapid Action Force. Already five battalions have been formed and another five are under training. We wish to increase the number of these battalions since this mixed force can be deployed wherever or whenever riots occur and will successfully restore law and order. The members of the Rapid Action Force will undergo a little more intensive training than an ordinary policeman. This training will be very comprehensive. It will be a complete action. The idea of Rapid Action Force was conceived during the time of Smt Indira Gandhi and also considered during the period of Rajivji. But I feel proud that I got the opportunity to implement the idea and we are pursuing these ideas and schemes relentlessly.

We have founded a National Minority Finance and Development

Corporation with an authorised capital of Rs. 500 crore only a day or two ago. When we decided to have this Corporation, we were considering whether it would be correct from the legal point of view. Then we came to the conclusion that the setting up of this Corporation is perfectly in order. There is nothing wrong in it. People will see that on one hand we will do everything possible to protect the life and property of the minorities and on the other, we will also do whatever is essential for the economic uplift of minorities. Of course, the Minority Commission has already been vested with statutory powers. Its recommendations will be accepted to the extent possible.

Maulana Azad Education Foundation will be utilised as a medium for further educating the people belonging to minorities. We will give the Foundation more fund, more help. We will make the Foundation an instrument to serve more and more people in the field of education.

In the context of Waqf Act, either a new law will be enacted or a number of amendments will be made in the existing law. This will help prevent irregularities regarding Waqf properties. There are a number of programmes, for instance, there is the 15-point programme. There are other programmes too, but as we are short of time, we cannot go into details. However I want to emphasise once again that whether it be the minority or majority, they have to live together. Nobody will go from this place. We will stay here together. This is our determination.

Therefore, the signal that we would like to send to the world today is: We will not allow our unity and integrity to suffer and will not allow our achievements to fritter away. This is a new responsibility which we have to shoulder. We pray to the Lord Almighty to give us strength so that we may go forward and proceed towards our goal. From Mahatma Gandhi to Rajivji all the leaders have shown the way to our countrymen. Proceeding on that path, we have to tell the world that our steps would never falter. We will continue to move forward on the path shown by them and we shall redeem ourselves along with the country and will be able to redeem the human race as well.

In this great task of redeeming the human race, we will fulfil our responsibility. With this determination and resolve we assemble here together once again on this fifteenth of August. All the countrymen, wherever you are, who are listening to me in every nook and corner, I wish to congratulate and thank all of you once again. I wish you happiness and prosperity in the coming year.