

Dear citizens,

1. I greet you on the 63rd anniversary of our independence. When Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru unfurled the Tricolour on this historic Red Fort, on 15th August, 1947, he called himself the first servant of India. I address you today in the same spirit of service.

2. A few days back, many precious lives were lost in Laddakh due to a cloud burst. I convey my heart felt condolences to the family members and other near and dear ones of those who have perished. In this hour of grief, the whole country stands with the people of Laddakh. It is my assurance that the Central Government will do everything possible for rehabilitation of the affected people.

3. When I addressed you last year on Independence Day, our country was facing a number of difficulties. There was a drought like situation in many parts of the country. We were also affected by the global economic slow down. I am happy to say that we have acquitted ourselves well in these difficult circumstances. Despite many problems, the rate of our economic growth has been better than most other countries in the world. This shows the strength of our economy.

4. This strength has been evident not only in the last one year but also in our economic progress in the last many years. Today, India stands among the fastest growing economies of the world. As the world's largest democracy, we have become an example for many other countries to emulate. Our citizens have the right to make their voice heard. Our country is viewed with respect all over the world. Our views command attention in international fora.

5. All of you have contributed to India's success. The hard work of our workers, our artisans, our farmers has brought our country to where it stands today. I specially salute our soldiers whose bravery ensures the

safety of our borders. I pay tribute to all those martyrs who have sacrificed their lives for our country.

6. We are building a new India in which every citizen would have a stake, an India which would be prosperous and in which all citizens would be able to live a life of honour and dignity in an environment of peace and goodwill. An India in which all problems could be solved through democratic means. An India in which the basic rights of every citizen would be protected. In the last few years, we have taken many significant steps in this direction. Every person living in rural areas now has the assurance of 100 days of employment through the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. The Right to Information Act is helping our citizens to become more aware. This year our Government has enacted the Right to Education which will help every Indian to share in the benefits of the country's economic progress and also to contribute to it. To ensure equal partnership of women in our progress, we have taken initiative for reservation for women in Parliament and in State legislatures. Apart from this, reservation for women has been increased to 50 per cent in local bodies.

7. Despite our many strengths, we face some serious challenges. We should resolve today that we will meet these challenges as one people. Our society often gets divided in the name of religion, State, caste or language. We should resolve that we will not allow divisions in our society under any circumstance. Tolerance and generosity have been a part of our traditions. We should strengthen these traditions. As we progress economically our society should also become more sensitive. We should be modern and progressive in our outlook.

8. Our Government has laid special emphasis on the welfare of our farmers and on increasing agricultural production. After we came to power in 2004, we realized that the state of Indian agriculture in the preceding 7-8 years was not satisfactory. Our Government increased public investment in

agriculture. We started new schemes for increasing production. We encouraged agricultural planning at the district level. I am happy that the growth rate of our agriculture has increased substantially in the last few years. But we are still far from achieving our goal. We need to work harder so that we can increase the agricultural growth rate to 4 per cent per annum.

9. Our Government wants a food safety net in which no citizen of ours would go hungry. This requires enhanced agricultural production which is possible only by increasing productivity. Our country has not witnessed any big technological breakthrough in agriculture after the Green Revolution. We need technology which would address the needs of dry land agriculture. In addition, our agriculture should also be able to deal with new challenges like climate change, falling levels of ground water and deteriorating quality of soil. In the history of Indian agriculture, Norman Borlaug commands a special place. About 40 to 50 years back he developed new and more productive seeds of wheat. Under the leadership of Smt. Indira Gandhiji, India achieved the Green Revolution by adopting these seeds. I am happy to announce that the Borlaug Institute of South Asia is being established in India. This institute would facilitate availability of new and improved seeds and new technology to the farmers of India and other countries of South Asia.

10. We have always taken care to provide remunerative prices to farmers so that they are encouraged to increase production. Support prices have been increased every year in the last six years. The support price for wheat was enhanced to Rs.1,100 per quintal last year from Rs.630 per quintal in 2003-04. In paddy, this increase was from Rs.550 per quintal to Rs.1,000 per quintal. But one effect of providing higher prices to farmers is that food prices in the open market also increase.

11. I know that in the last few months high inflation has caused you difficulties. It is the poor who are the worst affected by rising prices,

especially when the prices of commodities of every day use like foodgrains, pulses, vegetables increase. It is for this reason that we have endeavored to minimize the burden of increased prices on the poor. Today, I do not want to go into the detailed reasons for high inflation. But, I would certainly like to say that we are making every possible effort to tackle this problem. I am also confident that we will succeed in these efforts.

12. It is obvious that any person or institution cannot spend more than his income over a long period of time, even if it is the Government. It is our responsibility that we manage our economy with prudence so that our development is not affected adversely in the future because of high debt. We import about 80 per cent of our requirement of petroleum products. After 2004, we have increased the prices of petroleum products much less compared to the increase in the price of crude oil in the international market. The subsidy on petroleum products has been increasing every year. It had become necessary therefore to increase the prices of petroleum products. If this had not been done, it would not have been possible for our budget to bear the burden of subsidy and our programmes for education, health and employment of the poor would have been adversely affected.

13. In the 63 years after independence, India has covered a long distance on the path of development. But our destination is still far away. A large part of our population still suffers from persistent poverty, hunger and disease. When our Government came to power in 2004, we resolved to build a new India under a progressive social agenda. We wanted the fruits of development to reach the common man. We initiated programmes especially targeted to the welfare of the socially and economically backward sections of our society. We still stand committed to the welfare of the poor, the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, minorities, women and other backward sections of our society. But today we do not need many new programmes to achieve our goals. However, we do need to implement the schemes we have already started more effectively,

minimizing the chances of corruption and misuse of public money. We want to achieve this in partnership with the State Governments, Panchayat Raj Institutions and civil society groups.

14. Secularism is one of the pillars of our democracy. It has been the tradition of our country and society to treat all religions with equal respect. For centuries India has welcomed new religions and all have flourished here. Secularism is also our constitutional obligation. Our Government is committed to maintain communal peace and harmony. We also consider it our duty to protect the minorities and provide for their special needs. This is why we have started many new programmes in the last four years for the welfare of our brothers and sisters belonging to the minority communities. These include scholarships for minority students and special programmes for the development of districts which have a high concentration of minorities. These schemes have shown good results. We will vigorously take this work forward.

15. We have been giving special attention to education and health in the last six years. Improvement in these two areas is an important component of our strategy for inclusive growth. It is also necessary for higher economic growth in the years to come. After independence, these two areas could not get the importance they deserved. We tried to change this state of affairs in the 11th Plan. Today, almost every child in our country has access to primary education. Now, we need to pay more attention to secondary and higher education. We also need to improve the quality of education at all levels. It is our endeavour that every child, irrespective of whether he is rich or poor and which section of the society he belongs to, should be given an education that enables him to realize his potential and makes him a responsible citizen of our country. We will continue to implement the new schemes that we have started in the last six years in the areas of education and health with sincerity and hard work and in partnership with the State Governments. We will soon bring a Bill to Parliament for constitution of two separate councils in higher education and

health respectively so that reforms in these two areas can be accelerated.

16. Nutritious food and good health services are necessary but not enough for ensuring good health of our citizens. We also need cleanliness and good sanitation in our villages, towns and cities. There are many diseases which would be difficult to prevent otherwise. The truth is that our country lags behind in this area. I consider it a primary responsibility of all our citizens to maintain cleanliness and hygiene around them. I would like our children to be taught the importance of cleanliness and hygiene in schools from the very beginning under a campaign for a Clean India. I appeal to the State Governments, Panchayat Raj Institutions, civil society groups and common citizens to make this campaign successful.

17. Mahatma Gandhi had said that our earth has enough for everyone's need but not for everyone's greed. Imprudent use of the earth's natural resources has resulted in the problem of climate change. We need to use our natural resources with care and prudence. It is our responsibility towards the coming generations to protect and preserve our forests, rivers and mountains. Our government will endeavour to take care of environmental concerns in our projects for economic development.

18. There is a large deficit in our physical infrastructure which affects our economic development adversely. There is a shortfall in the supply of electricity to industries. Our roads, ports and airports are not of world standards. We have been trying to increase electricity production and improve our roads, ports and airports. The resources required to create good physical infrastructure are difficult for the Government alone to mobilize. Therefore, we have endeavoured to involve the private sector in our efforts. The steps that we have taken after 2004 to improve our physical infrastructure have started bearing fruit now. About one and half a months back, I dedicated a new terminal of the Delhi airport to the nation. This is an excellent terminal which has been completed in record time. We will continue to make such efforts to improve our physical infrastructure.

19. There has been much discussion recently on the issue of internal security. If law and order in any part of India deteriorates or peace and harmony gets disturbed, the common man is adversely affected. Therefore, it is one of the primary responsibilities of any government to maintain law and order so that the citizens can live and earn their livelihood in an atmosphere of peace and harmony. Naxalism is a serious challenge to our internal security. I pay tribute to the men and officers of our security forces who have become martyrs in the attacks by naxalites in the last few months. I have stated this before and I say it again - our Government will fully discharge its responsibility to protect each and every citizen of our country. We will deal firmly with those who resort to violence. We will provide all possible help to State Governments to maintain the rule of law in areas affected by naxalism. I once again appeal to naxalites to abjure violence, come for talks with the Government and join hands with us to accelerate social and economic development. A few days back I took a meeting with the Chief Ministers of States affected by naxalism. We will fully implement the consensus that emerged in that meeting. I would like to repeat here a point that I made in that meeting. It is imperative that Centre and States work together to meet the challenge of naxalism. It would be very difficult for any State to tackle this problem without cooperation from the Centre and coordination between States. We all need to rise above our personal and political interests to meet this challenge.

20. As I have stated earlier, most naxalite affected areas lag behind in development. Many such areas also have a large concentration of our adivasi brothers and sisters. We want to end the neglect of these areas. I have asked the Planning Commission to formulate a comprehensive scheme towards this end, which we would implement fully. It is also our endeavour that our adivasi brothers and sisters join the mainstream of development. They have been dependent on forest produce for centuries and this dependence should not end without the creation of new sources of livelihood. Apart from adequate compensation for land which is acquired

from them, we should also ensure that our adivasi brothers and sisters have a stake in the developmental project being undertaken.

21. I would like to state one more thing in this context. It is very necessary to make the administrative machinery more sensitive in areas affected by naxalism. The government officials who work there should not only be sincere but should also be alive to the special needs of our adivasi brothers and sisters. It is my hope that the State Governments will pay adequate attention to these requirements.

22. We have a special responsibility towards the States of the North East. We are trying to live up to that responsibility. The North Eastern part of our country has been witness to some unpleasant incidents in the recent months. I would like to convey to all political parties and groups of the North East that disputes in the name of State or tribe can only harm all of us. Discussion and dialogue are the only options to resolve complex issues. As far as the Central Government is concerned, we are ready to take forward every process of talks which could lead to progress in resolution of problems.

23. In Jammu and Kashmir, we are ready to talk to every person or group which abjures violence. Kashmir is an integral part of India. Within this framework, we are ready to move forward in any talks which would increase the partnership of the common man in governance and also enhance their welfare. Recently, some young men have lost their lives in violence in Jammu and Kashmir. We deeply regret this. The years of violence should now end. Such violence would not benefit anyone. I believe that India's democracy has the generosity and flexibility to be able to address the concerns of any area or group in the country. I recently participated in a meeting with political parties from Jammu and Kashmir. We will endeavour to take this process forward. I would like to convey to our countrymen, especially our citizens in Jammu and Kashmir and in the North East, that they should adopt democratic means to join hands with us



for their and country's welfare.

24. We want prosperity, peace and harmony in our neighbouring countries. Whatever differences we have with our neighbouring countries, we want to resolve them through discussions. As far as Pakistan is concerned, we expect from them that they would not let their territory be used for acts of terrorism against India. We have been emphasizing this in all our discussions with the Pakistan Government. If this is not done, we cannot progress far in our dialogue with Pakistan.

25. I would also like to say something which is related to our glorious cultural traditions. The use of harsh and unpleasant words in our political discourse has increased in recent days. This is against our traditions of generosity, humility and tolerance. Criticism has a place of its own in a democracy and in a progressive society. However, criticism should not be undignified. We should have the capacity to reconcile opposite points of view on important issues through debate and discussion. I would request all political parties to consider this issue.

26. The Commonwealth Games will start in Delhi after about one and a half months. This will be a proud moment for the whole country and especially for Delhi. I am convinced that all our countrymen will treat the Games as a national festival and will leave no stone unturned to make them a success. The successful organization of Commonwealth Games would be another signal to the world that India is rapidly marching ahead with confidence.

27. Our future is bright. The day when our dreams will come true is not far off. Let us all resolve on this anniversary of our independence that we will keep the flag of our nation flying high. Let us march ahead together on the path of progress and prosperity.

28. Dear children, please say Jai Hind with me.

'JAI HIND'

'JAI HIND'

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