

My dear countrymen, brothers, sisters, and dear children

My greetings to all of you on this day, the anniversary of our Independence

1. Today is an auspicious day for our country. Today we enter the 60th year of our Independence. Today we re-dedicate ourselves to the progress and prosperity of our nation. To the welfare of all our people. To the unity and integrity of our country.

2. Today we salute our beloved tricolor. We pay tribute to Mahatma Gandhi and all those freedom fighters because of whose efforts and sacrifices we secured our Independence. We remember all those whose hard work and efforts keep our flag flying high and keep our country on the road to progress. We pay tribute to the brave members of our armed forces, farmers, teachers, scientists, workers and the millions of our countrymen who are toiling tirelessly for the progress and prosperity of our nation.

3. In the early hours of the 15th of August, 1947, when our nation had just become Independent, our first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru spoke to the nation and asked us all one important question on the very first day we became a free country: "Are we brave enough and wise enough to grasp this opportunity and accept the challenge of the future?"

4. Today, my fellow citizens, I stand here once again and ask you that same question. Are we ready to face the challenge of the future? Are we brave enough, to do so, and wise enough, in doing so? Can we rediscover the ideas and ideals that shaped our freedom struggle, and use them to take our country forward into the future? Are we willing to show the courage and the wisdom that Panditji wanted us to show in building a new India in a new world?

My dear countrymen,

5. The going has never been as good for India in the past as it is now. Our economy has been growing at an impressive pace of over 8%. Such rapid growth over three successive years is unprecedented in Indian history. Wherever I go, I see our nation on the move. Our industry and services sectors are showing impressive growth. I see a reassuring confidence in our industry in being able to take on the challenge of the rest of the world. The growth of the manufacturing industry has touched 11% in the last quarter, generating many jobs for our youth and workers. I see our service sector competing with the best and earning valuable foreign exchange.

6. All around us, we see new roads being built. The railways are expanding their reach. New power plants are being built. New airports are being planned. Vast industrial estates and Special Economic Zones are coming up. This dynamism is the result of the enterprise, creativity and hard work of millions of Indians. They are boldly taking our country into the future, treading on untrodden paths. I am sure this will result in far greater prosperity for our people. I sincerely believe that the most effective way to banish poverty is to generate growth which in turn will create new opportunities for gainful employment. Hence, economic growth is of primary importance for us.

7. It is almost sixty years since Independence. It is but a brief period in the history of an ancient civilization. But, it is a long time in the life of a young nation. In these sixty years, the world has been transformed beyond recognition. The empires of Europe have faded away. New powers have emerged in Asia. Look at where Japan was and where it is today. Look at where China was and where it is today. Look at where the countries of South-east Asia were and where are they today? When I see them, I wonder whether we are living up to our full potential or not.

8. India is certainly on the march. Yet, we have miles to go before we

can truly say that we have made our tryst with destiny. Sixty years ago, Panditji told us that the two challenges before a free India was to end the ancient scourge of poverty, ignorance and disease and end the inequality of opportunity. India has marched a great distance forward in these sixty years, but the challenge of banishing poverty remains with us. We have yet to banish hunger from our land. We have yet to eradicate illiteracy. We have yet to ensure that every Indian enjoys good health.

9. There is visible progress all around. However, when I see this, I have some worries. And I am aware, that every Indian has similar worries. Even as we move forward rapidly, to claim our rightful place in the comity of nations, I see that there are vast segments of our people who are untouched by modernization; who continue to do backbreaking labour; who continue to suffer from iniquitous social orders. I see that our farmers in many parts are in a crisis, not managing to eke out a decent living from their land. When I visited Vidarbha, the plight of the farmers there made a deep impact on me. The agricultural crisis that is forcing them to take the desperate step of committing suicide needs to be resolved. We need to think about how we can provide a decent livelihood to our farmers?

10. When I see large development projects coming up, while one rejoices at the progress that is being made, one worries for those who are displaced, for those who have lost their land and livelihood. When one sees our cities growing rapidly, one sees visible progress but at the same time, one worries for the large number of people who live in their slums. When our industry and services compete successfully across the globe, we celebrate our success in global markets; but at the same time, we are buffeted by the same global forces when oil prices go up because of factors beyond our control. Globalisation certainly has its benefits; but it can also hurt the common man.

11. The challenge for us as a nation is to address this duality - to ensure that while we keep the wheels of progress moving rapidly forward, no

section of society and no part of the country is left behind; to ensure that growth generates the necessary wealth which can then finance the welfare of marginalized groups; to ensure that growth generates employment and a bright future for our youth.

12. In the past two years, it has been our endeavour to address these concerns. We have taken many steps to expand employment opportunities and improve the quality of life in rural and urban areas.

13. The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act has been enacted to provide income security for those suffering from extreme poverty. The programmes under this Act, for which more than 2 crore families have already registered, currently cover 200 districts and will be expanded gradually to cover the entire country. This pathbreaking Act is the most important social safety net for our poor. I am confident that this Act will help us in eradicating poverty.

14. Bharat Nirman is another programme which will modernize our villages. As our villages get fully electrified and get connected by roads and telephones, their economies will prosper. As they get better irrigation facilities, their agriculture will grow. As drinking water and housing facilities improve, their living conditions will improve. They will participate in the growth which is already visible in urban India. I am happy that progress in the first year of Bharat Nirman has been good and by 2009, I expect to see visible results across the country.

15. These programmes are our weapons in the "War on Poverty". The most effective weapon against poverty is employment. And, higher economic growth is the best way to generate employment. We must create an environment that encourages business to grow and create more employment, especially in the manufacturing sector. We have created a conducive environment for our industrial enterprises to flourish and the results of this are visible. We are supporting not just large industries, but

also the labour intensive small scale and handloom sectors through special programmes. Handlooms and textile industries employ over 3.5 crore people. We are giving cheaper loans to this sector and handloom cooperatives are being revitalised. I am hopeful that in the coming years, lakhs of jobs will be generated in these sectors.

My dear countrymen

16. Two years ago, speaking from the Red Fort, I promised a "New Deal for Rural India". There is much we have done, but I know much more needs to be done. We have kept our word and almost doubled agricultural credit in less than three years as promised. We are providing short term loans to farmers at 7%. We have waived interest on over-due loans for debt-stressed farmers in Vidarbha and will do the same in other suicide affected districts. We are trying to reach institutional credit to each and every farmer so that they are out of the clutches of moneylenders. For this, we are reviving the cooperative banking system for which a Rs 13,000 crore package is being implemented. We have been paying special attention to horticulture, animal husbandry, cotton, sugarcane and other crops. A National Fisheries Development Board has been set up for increasing the livelihood of fishermen. Agricultural research is being improved and Krishi Vigyan Kendras will soon be functioning in every district of the country by the year end.

17. However, I admit that much still needs to be done to improve the prospects for farmers. Especially in rain-fed areas and for dry-land agriculture. We will need to work towards ensuring more remunerative prices for our farmers. I am aware of the acute distress of our farmers who bear the burden of heavy debt. We have recently constituted an expert group to look into the problem of agricultural indebtedness. I am confident that in a few months, we will take concrete measures to help our farmers overcome the burden of crushing debt. Most importantly, we must ensure that more people get employment in manufacturing and services so that the

disproportionate burden on agriculture in providing a livelihood to two-thirds of our population gets reduced.

18. The results of our efforts to improve agriculture are clearly visible in some places. Farmers are getting better prices for many crops. This helps them earn a better livelihood. This, on the other hand hurts the common man when the prices of essential food commodities go up. We need to understand that if we want better prices for farmers so that they earn a better livelihood, the prices of what they produce and sell will have to go up! We certainly cannot grudge our farmers better incomes when incomes of other sections of society are rising! In order to ensure that the needy and the poor do not get adversely affected, our government is committed to ensuring adequate availability of essential commodities at affordable prices to them.

Brothers and Sisters,

19. I know that each of our families is concerned about the prices of essential commodities. Let me assure you that we will do whatever is required to keep prices under check. But I must remind you that two years ago the international price of oil was just over \$30 per barrel. Today it is close to \$75. Even though world oil prices have more than doubled, we have succeeded in insulating our consumers to a great extent. Prices of kerosene and LPG have not been raised. But there is a limit to which we can go on subsidizing the consumption of petroleum products in the face of rising import costs. How much more can the government treasury bear this burden? At some point, this will affect our ability to spend on other important development programmes. In order to keep food prices within the reach of the common man, we have even allowed the import of some products to meet the shortage in our markets.

Brothers and sisters,

20. While employment and agriculture are of immediate concern to all, our long term concern is for the future of our children. They need to be healthy, well educated, with hope for the future. We launched the National Rural Health Mission to provide better health care in rural areas. Under this programme, almost 2 lakh women have been kept as health assistants (ASHAs) at the village level; 4 lakh more women will be in place soon. Through them, we will wage a war against malnutrition of children, against malaria, tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS and other diseases. These diseases put a heavy financial burden on our people. In Vidarbha, I was pained to meet families of farmers who had committed suicide because they could not repay the loans they had taken to meet the cost of health care of their loved ones. We will take every possible step to help people overcome the burden of poverty and disease.

21. The expanded Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan will ensure that all our children go to school. Under the universal Mid-day Meal Programme, almost 12 crore children are getting a nutritious meal at school. Through these two programmes, we will ensure that all our children complete basic schooling. I request every citizen to ensure that every child of school-going age is enrolled in a school. We will pay particular attention to the empowerment through education of children belonging to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Minorities. We will provide all possible assistance for the all round growth of children suffering from disabilities or with special needs. We also will care for those who suffer from disabilities so that they can lead a dignified life in society.

22. All the initiatives that we have taken to push forward rural development and ensure farmers' welfare can be implemented only with the active participation of our panchayats. For this to happen, our State Governments have to empower our panchayats. We have to pay more attention to the quality of local administration - in our villages and districts, in our towns and cities. We need to rid our municipalities of the cancer of corruption. State governments have a major role to play in this.

Brothers and sisters,

23. Cities and towns are centers of growth and generators of employment opportunities. Our cities need to have a new look for which they need massive investment and renewal. They need basic amenities like sanitation, drinking water and proper housing for the poor. They need public transport, parks and playgrounds. We need cities in which the working poor can live with self-respect and dignity; cities in which children and women feel safe and secure. In order to ensure that our cities have better infrastructure and that they have better living conditions, we launched the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission. This programme and other similar ones have started showing results. Work has begun on Metro systems in Bangalore and Mumbai. I see a glorious decade of city development ahead of us.

24. The challenge before Government is to implement these programmes. We have to improve the way governments function and deliver public services. How do we do this? How do we ensure that higher financial outlays translate into better outcomes? I sincerely hope that the Right to Information Act enacted by our Government will empower our people who will be able to use their rights to make government more accountable. We have to work hard to eliminate corruption in the delivery of public services, in fact eliminate it from all walks of life. We will work to put in place a system that rewards honesty, probity and efficiency.

Brothers and sisters

25. India has contributed extensively to human knowledge. Today, we are at the dawn of a new millennium which many call the knowledge economy. In this world, knowledge will determine our progress and the place we occupy in the world. We must continue to be at the forefront of new research and new thinking, especially in science and technology. We



must build top-class institutions. We have begun work on three new Indian Institutes of Science, Education and Research in Kolkata, Pune and Punjab. We have also begun work on 19 medical institutions of the same standard as AIIMS. We will need to ensure far greater availability of educational opportunities at the higher education level so that we have not just a literate youth but a skilled youth, with skills which can fetch them gainful employment. As our economy booms and as our industry grows, I hear a pressing complaint about an imminent shortage of skilled employees. As a country endowed with huge human resources, we cannot let this be a constraint. We are planning to launch a Mission on Vocational Education so that the skill deficit in our economy is addressed.

26. As we expand educational opportunities, we must ensure that these opportunities are accessible to all marginalized and weaker sections of our society. Our government is committed to providing reservation in educational institutions for students from socially backward sections of society. We will do so, while at the same time expanding educational opportunities for all youth. This is our solemn commitment. In this manner, we will recognize and reward individual merit and hard work while working for an inclusive society.

27. While we are moving fast to develop every region of our country, we have to take pains to see that this does not adversely affect those who are displaced. Nor should it affect our environment. Nor should any region of the country get left behind. Our government will soon put in place a comprehensive Rehabilitation Policy so that displacement does not lead to impoverishment and those who lose their land benefit from subsequent economic development. We have also taken special measures to save our wildlife, including the tiger. We are taking concrete steps to develop backward regions through the Backward Regions Grant Fund and will be spending Rs 5000 crores annually in 250 districts.

My dear countrymen

28. Our other concern is national security. India is facing two major threats to its internal security. Terrorism and Naxalism. Just over a month ago, Mumbai witnessed the most inhuman terrorist attack in the recent past, killing and injuring hundreds of innocent citizens. The entire nation was pained by this suffering. Mumbai demonstrated its courage and patience and showed its resolve not to be cowed down by these incidents.

29. I had said in Mumbai then that it cannot be business as usual for any of us. Terrorists want to undermine our growing economic strength; destroy our unity; and provoke communal incidents. We cannot allow this to happen. Our strength lies in our unity. We will not allow the secular fabric of our country to be broken.

30. I give my assurance to every citizen that we will do our utmost to preserve our unity and integrity, to make our country safe and secure for every citizen. We will modernize, strengthen and properly equip our security forces and our intelligence agencies. We will leave no stone unturned in ensuring that terrorist elements in India are neutralized and smashed. Let those who want to hurt us by inflicting a thousand cuts remember - no one can break our will, or unity. No one can make India kneel.

31. While terrorism has been raising its ugly head time and again, we have also seen peace having its victories. The people of Jammu and Kashmir continue to face the wrath of terrorism. But they have also seen new rays of hope for peace and progress. New links of connectivity have brought people on both sides of the Line of Control closer - Srinagar to Muzaffarabad, Poonch to Rawalkot. Through the Round Table Conferences, we have started a dialogue with all political groups and parties of Jammu and Kashmir. We are jointly exploring new pathways to build a better tomorrow for its people - a tomorrow where they can live in peace and dignity, free from fear, want and exploitation.

32. Today the people of the North-Eastern region look to the future with hope. The last two years have seen immense progress in the North East in all spheres of development - better roads, better rail connectivity, the first ever thermal power projects in the region and better universities. I am hopeful that in the coming few years, the North-eastern region will gradually catch up with the rest of the country. However, many states here are still afflicted by insurgency. There is a great desire among the people of the region for peace and tranquility. While we are determined to tackle insurgency, we are hopeful that the dialogue that we have initiated with many disaffected groups will produce a peace dividend. A life of progress and prosperity with self-respect and dignity is the right of the people there and we are confident of providing it.

33. I want those who have mistakenly taken to Naxalism to understand that in democratic India, power will never flow from the barrel of a gun. Real power flows from the ballot box. At the same time, our State Governments must pay special attention to the welfare of our tribals and small and marginal farmers. It is their distress that Naxalites exploit. The path of violence can never solve the problems of the poor. Our security forces will respond appropriately to the violence unleashed by Naxalites.

34. In the past one month, many parts of the country, particularly Andhra Pradesh, Surat and Maharashtra, have been badly affected by floods and there has been extensive loss of life and property. We will provide all possible assistance for the relief of these regions.

Brothers and Sisters,

35. Every Indian wants to live in a neighbourhood of peace, stability and prosperity. People in our neighbouring countries share the same aspirations. South Asia is a common cultural and economic unit. Our past and destinies are inter-linked. India, as the largest country in the region, is

ready to give our neighbours a stake in our own prosperity and share the fruits of our growth with them. However, the dream of a South Asian community, where borders have ceased to matter and there is an unhindered flow of goods and peoples, culture and ideas, can hardly be realized if terrorist violence and the politics of hate and confrontation continue to cast a dark shadow.

35. We are prepared to work together with all our neighbours to usher in an era of peace and prosperity for our peoples. We have taken several initiatives in this regard, in particular with Pakistan. To be successful, these initiatives need an atmosphere of peace. It is obvious that unless Pakistan takes concrete steps to implement the solemn assurances it has given to prevent cross-border terrorism against India from any territory within its control, public opinion in India, which has supported the peace process, will be undermined. All countries in our region must recognize that terrorism anywhere is a threat to peace and prosperity everywhere. It must be confronted with our united efforts. There is a large constituency for peace and shared prosperity among our people and we must work together to build on that.

37. In the past two years, we have succeeded in creating an international environment which supports our development aspirations. Our relations with the United States of America, China, Japan, and the European Union, have never been better and with Russia, we have further strengthened our time-tested partnership. In South-East Asia, India has been welcomed into the East Asian Summit. There has been a significant expansion of both our political and economic links with countries of the Gulf and the Arab world. The continents of Africa and Latin America are now the new areas of focus for our diplomacy and India's engagement has become truly global. We are recognized for the scale of our achievements since Independence and the world wants India to progress.

My dear countrymen,

38. India is a young nation. India is a nation of young people. Our youth are ready to work hard for a bright future. Our former Prime Minister, Shri Rajiv Gandhi, was greatly concerned about the prospects for our youth and took many steps for ensuring a bright future for them.

39. Even today, the youth of our country are in search of a bright future. They seek new opportunities and are in search of new possibilities. They are willing to think in new ways. They have no time for old ideas and ideologies. They want to build a new India. We must build a new India of their dreams. I want every one of our youth to walk shoulder to shoulder, and walk forward with us in building a new India. Every young person must have faith in our future. To know that this country will create opportunities for all for the full expression of their talent and skill.

40. We have a dream of an India in which every woman can feel safe, secure and empowered. Where our mothers, sisters and daughters are assured a life of dignity and personal security. We must end the crime of female foeticide. We must eliminate gender disparities. We must see that every young woman is educated and skilled and capable of guiding a new generation.

41. The laws of our land are meant to protect every law abiding citizen. The rule of law can become a reality only if justice is seen to be delivered. Only if the rights of law-abiding citizens are protected. We need a more efficient, humane and responsive police force. We also need a more efficient and effective judiciary. Our government will work to make this possible.

42. Today, from this historic Red Fort, I appeal to every one of you to re-dedicate yourself to build a new India.

- An India that is united in thought, not divided by religion and

language.

- An India that is united in our Indianness, not divided by caste and region.
- An India that is united in seeking new opportunities for growth, not divided by disparities.
- An India that is caring and inclusive.

43. Our religions may be different. Our castes may be different. Our languages may be different. But we are all Indians. In our progress lies the progress of the nation. Our fortunes and our nation's fortunes are intertwined. And working together, we can make this fortune a glorious one.

44. If we have to fulfil our potential, we need a politics that will help us realize it. We need a politics that will propel us forward. We need a politics that will guide us to new frontiers, take us to new horizons. I urge all our political leaders to think deeply about the future of our country. We must shun the politics of divisiveness and adopt the politics of change and progress. Our political parties and leaders must learn to work together. To build a consensus around national issues. If we are able to do so, then I am confident that then we will soon be able to realize the golden future which millions of our countrymen are eagerly waiting for.

45. Let us all join together, hand in hand, to build a new India.

Jai Hind.

Jai Hind.

Jai Hind.