

My dear countrymen, brothers, sisters, and dear children - Greetings to all of you on this day, the anniversary of our Independence.

This is a day we salute our Tiranga and feel pride and joy in watching it fly high in the blue sky. This is a day we remember and honour the leaders of our Freedom Movement for the struggle they waged under the inspiring leadership of Mahatma Gandhiji and for the victory they won against foreign rule. This is a day we thank our soldiers and security forces for their bravery and commitment. We salute them for their dedication and discipline - farmers, workers, teachers, professionals, scientists and our elected representatives.

In every walk of life, each one of us contributes in our own way to the building of our dear Bharat. What is that Bharat that we all wish to build?

A Bharat that is just and humane.

A Bharat that treats all its citizens as equals.

A Bharat that is prosperous.

A Bharat that lives in peace.

A Bharat in which every person is literate and healthy.

A Bharat in which everyone who seeks work is able to find it, and works for a brighter future for all of us. My greetings to all of you.

As I stand here before you, I am reminded of the words of our first Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, when he spoke to the Nation on the first anniversary of our Independence in 1948. At that time I was a young student, and looked upon the dawn of Independence as the opening up of new vistas of opportunities to build an India of our dreams. Panditji had

then said, "All of us talk of India and all of us demand many things from India. What do we give her in return?" Panditji asked, and he said, "India will ultimately give us what we give her of love and service and productive and creative work. India will be what we are: our thoughts and actions will shape her."

Friends, I ask each one of you to remember these wise words of Panditji as you go about doing your work, be it on farms, in factories, in schools, in colleges, in government offices, in shops, in research laboratories. Our Nation is what we are. It will become what we make of ourselves.

Brothers and sisters, it is one brick after another that helps make a building. Millions of bricks go to make a great building. In the same manner, the efforts of millions of people go into the formation of a nation. The process of nation building is a great enterprise of adventure and creativity. It requires all of us to work together, bonded by our love for our Motherland. This love flows from our identity as Indians. Whatever be our religion, region, language, caste or culture, we are all Indians and India is ours.

Our strength derives from our unity in diversity. The principles of secularism, social justice and the equality of all before law are the defining feature of our nation. Today is a day we re-dedicate ourselves to the service of our Nation, and of each and every citizen, especially those less fortunate than us.

This day comes for us in the middle of the monsoons. Each year when we meet here and see the Tiranga being unfurled on the Red Fort, we also look at the clouds above and wonder whether it would rain. This year too we have looked at the skies with anxiety.

In Andhra Pradesh I went to understand the problems of farmers, suffering from the impact of drought, and to hold the hands of the families that had lost their breadwinner due to the unbearable burden of debt. For miles

together I could see no water. In Assam and Bihar I went to share the concern of people whose lives have been dislocated by floods. For miles without end I could see only water. Drought and floods are two fundamental problems that continue to bring suffering to our rural population. We need concerted action to deal with these perennial problems.

Our government has already taken some steps to deal with them. We intend to take more steps in future. We need to insulate our people from the impact of drought by creating local level water security. We have to mobilize our people to come forward to take up the challenge of water conservation and management. We are committed to increasing public investment in irrigation and addressing the specific problems of each river basin, in an environment and people friendly manner.

Water is a national resource, and we have to take an integrated view of our country's water resources, our needs and our policies and water utilization practices. We need to ensure the equitable use of scarce water resources.

The waters of our sacred rivers have for centuries nurtured our civilization. They are the threads that run through the fabric of our nation. We cannot allow these waters to divide us. I urge you and all our political leaders to take a national and a holistic view of the challenge of managing our water resources.

Dealing with the problem of water is an important commitment we have made as part of our "New Deal for Rural India". We have also taken steps to address the problem of availability and access to credit in rural areas. The "New Deal" that rural India needs must encompass investment in irrigation, credit delivery, health care, availability of electricity, primary education, rural roads and the modernization of the infrastructure for agriculture.

We must increasingly use modern science and technology to address the

needs of dry land farming, the diversification of our cropping pattern, micro-irrigation and the quality of our livestock. Improving rural connectivity and access to information can enrich the farm community. Here Governmental initiative can be multiplied by the effort of private enterprise and community action.

Friends, more than three decades ago, Smt. Indira Gandhiji had given the call "Garibi Hatao". We have reduced the incidence of poverty to some extent, but there is much more remaining to be done. While liberalizing and modernizing our economy and enabling individual enterprise to blossom, we must pay special attention to the elimination of poverty and the empowerment of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Castes and minorities. Our development strategies for tribal areas must be adequately sensitive to their felt needs and aspirations.

The empowerment of women is an important priority and the education of the girl child is vital to it. Our children are our future. In framing our policies we must keep the interests of future generations in mind. The Government will pursue social and economic policies that are conducive to the proper growth and development of our children, investing in their education, health and nutrition. A healthy child makes a healthy nation.

Employment generation has not kept pace with demand for jobs. Government will address this deficiency in the growth process by encouraging the growth of small and medium enterprises, agro industries and sectors like tourism, where there is a high job potential. There is also an urgent need to provide employment in rural areas especially in areas suffering from prolonged drought. The "Food For Work Programme" will be an important part of our strategy to deal with this challenge. New investment in the infrastructure sector will also help generate new jobs.

Our approach has to be one of seeking faster growth while ensuring that the benefits of growth are more evenly distributed. Our policies for higher

economic growth and modernization will be combined with an emphasis on social justice, communal harmony, rural development, regional balance and concern for the environment.

Dear Countrymen, from the National Common Minimum Programme, I have identified seven priority sectors for focused attention. These are agriculture, water, education, health care, employment, urban renewal and infrastructure. These Seven Sectors (saat sutra) are the pillars of the development bridge we must cross to ensure higher economic growth and more equitable social and economic development.

The concerns of most of our citizens revolve around what we do for agriculture, water, education, health and employment. We recognize that for the development of the country what we are able to do in the key infrastructure sectors like power, roads, railways, ports and airports is also critical.

The plans and priorities of our government have been outlined in detail in the National Common Minimum Programme, in my first address to the nation and in the Finance Minister's recent Budget speech. Today, I have no promises to make, but I have promises to keep.

The real challenge for me and for the Government at all levels is the challenge of implementation of our stated policies and programmes. Central, State and local bodies have to work together for Government to be an effective instrument of development for the benefit of our people. There are areas, in which the Government has to be actively engaged, like education, health care, roads, railways, high technology and defence.

However, for Government to be able to deliver results, we must reform the functioning of government. We have to make officials accountable - make Government more transparent. We have to make public enterprises more efficient. Citizens increasingly demand governments that are accountable

to them. They have a concern both for probity and efficiency in public affairs.

Fellow Citizens, the question of ethics in public life has repeatedly agitated our people and we have tried to find Constitutional, legislative and administrative devices to deal with the challenge. The time has come for us to consensually evolve a code of conduct for all political parties, a code of ethics for all individuals in public life, and a code of best practices for the Government at all levels. On this solemn occasion let us resolve to work together to develop such a code of conduct in a consensual way so as to uphold the values enshrined in our Constitution.

We must also look within our parties, and ourselves and ask ourselves what is the root cause of the decline in values in public life? How do we reform our public institutions, our political parties, and our government at various levels? When we launched economic reforms over a decade ago, we tried to liberate individual enterprise from the stranglehold of bureaucracy. We will continue to widen the space available for private enterprise and individual initiative.

But governments cannot be wished away, especially in a developing country like ours where the government has an important role to play. The challenge for economic reform today is to breathe new life into government so that it can play a positive role where it must.

But what is government? Government comprises people's representatives and civil servants. The reform of government is, therefore, a reform of the way we, the elected representatives and officials, work in government. It is you, fellow citizens, as members of the civil society, who must mobilize your enormous resources in support of such reform. To make democratic institutions more accountable we are committed to take several steps to strengthen the lowest tier of panchayats and urban local bodies. We need to build the capacity of decentralized bodies and their elected

representatives and this is best done through effective transfer of funds and functions to them.

Today if we effectively utilize our decentralised system of governance through panchayat raj, we can take concerted action for more effective delivery of basic services such as primary education, public health and health care, providing safe drinking water and sanitation.

When we talk of reforming government and of Panchayat Raj we are reminded of Rajiv Gandhi who took pioneering initiatives in both these areas. Also, nearly twenty years ago, Rajiv Gandhi first drew the nation's attention to the newly emerging electronics and computer revolution then underway. The enthusiastic manner in which the young people of our country have participated in the information technology revolution, turning India into an "IT super power", is a tribute to the farsightedness of Rajivji.

It is a matter of satisfaction today that IT is enabling us to improve the standard of living of ordinary people even in remote areas. We will continue to explore ways in which modern technology can improve the lives of ordinary people. We will improve broadband access and enable the required investment in IT infrastructure.

We live in an age where science and technology have become an important determinant of power and wealth. For our country to attain its due place in the 21st century, it is necessary to integrate science and technology in to all our development processes. The promotion of scientific temper must truly become a massive national movement.

We cannot make higher education a prisoner of either bureaucracy or ideology. It must develop on the foundations of professional excellence and intellectual integrity. The pursuit of excellence and concern for social equity must inform all our educational processes. The revered Dr. Ambedkar recognized very early the importance of education in the empowerment of

the under-privileged. "We may forego material benefits", observed Dr Ambedkar, "but we cannot forego our right and opportunities to reap the benefit of the highest education to the fullest extent."

Dear Countrymen, ours is a vast country in which many States are as big as some countries of the world. For the benefits of development to reach all corners of the country the Centre and States have to work in a spirit of cooperative federalism. It is the responsibility of the central government to help States to realize our common and shared objectives of development. But, there is much that State and local governments can do to promote growth, social justice and welfare. They must raise the required resources to the extent feasible. Equally important, attention must also be paid to the quality and effectiveness of Government.

I am concerned about the slow rate of growth of the backward regions, just as I am concerned about the economic distress of the less privileged sections of our society.

We will encourage new investment in less developed regions. We will help in strengthening developmental institutions there. Special attention must continue to be paid to governance and development in the North-Eastern States and in Jammu and Kashmir. The pattern of development must be such as to create new opportunities for job creation so that the youth of these regions can look to the future with renewed hope and confidence. These regions of our country can benefit by improving rail and road connectivity and encouraging new investment.

Both the North-East and Jammu and Kashmir are the most beautiful regions of our country. If we can work together to create an environment conducive to development and tourism, these regions will prosper more. Peace, social and political stability and communal harmony are essential for economic development. People want such peace and stability so that they can lead safe, secure and normal lives and go about their work, relax



and enjoy life.

We must fight all anti-national and anti-social forces that try to disrupt normal life. Be they terrorists or communal and other such divisive forces. Terrorism is a threat to our normal lives and we must all unite in fighting it. Violence has never helped in the progress and prosperity of any society. We will fight this menace to civilized existence with determination. There should be no doubts on this score. However, we are willing to talk to any group provided they abjure the path of violence.

Friends, today I want each of you to show the same degree of self-confidence that our freedom fighters showed, when they led our country to freedom, in your encounters with new markets and new opportunities. We have been an open society. But, in being open to the world, we have not lost our identity as a people. Again I remind you of what Gandhiji taught us. That our nation must be like a house built on firm foundations, whose windows are wide open to let the winds blow freely in every direction.

"I want the winds from every corner to blow through my house" Gandhiji said, "but I refuse to be swept off my feet by any of them". That has been our attitude to the world, culturally and economically, for centuries. We must continue to adopt that attitude even as we seek to build a more self reliant and modern economy.

It is such focused attention to development that will address the real concerns of our people today. It is by strengthening our economy and making our democracy more inclusive that we can walk tall in the comity of nations. It is because of our commitment to democracy and development that we also wish to live in peace in our neighbourhood and with the world as a whole.

As a people we have always lived in peace with our neighbours in Asia and

the Indian Ocean region. For centuries we welcomed with open arms both travellers and traders from different parts of the world. We ourselves set sail in search of markets and to spread the philosophies of our wise men. Even today we want to live in a neighbourhood of peace and prosperity.

I assure our armed forces and security forces our unstinted support to their welfare and to the modernization of our defences. They have played an admirable role in the defence of our unity and integrity. Not only have they defended our frontiers but also at home they have readily helped whenever their services have been sought in rescue and relief operations and in the protection of the life and property of fellow Indians.

Even as we devote our attention to defence, we must pay heed to the needs of development. All our neighbours are, like us, developing countries whose priority will also have to be the improvement of the quality of life of their citizens. We are not only bound together by our common borders but also by our common destiny. The assurance of peace and prosperity in our neighbourhood is an important priority for us. Our Government will give the highest priority to building closer political, economic and cultural ties with all our neighbours.

We have always been in favour of a purposive bilateral dialogue with Pakistan to resolve all outstanding issues. It is our intention to carry forward with firm resolve and sincerity the composite dialogue process with Pakistan. The edifice of peace that we wish to build must stand on the twin pillars of mutual trust and confidence. Of course, trends of cross-border terrorism and violence make our task more difficult and complex.

As far as our relations with China are concerned, the positive trends which commenced with Shri Rajiv Gandhi's visit to China in 1988, have provided a sound basis for later trends in our bilateral ties. We are committed to strengthening and expanding these relations. We shall carry forward the process of discussion to resolve the boundary question with political vision

and a practical approach.

We value the friendship of all nations, big and small and we will seek closer economic relations with all countries. As a democratic country of more than a 100 crore people we are destined to play an important and positive role in world affairs, in structuring a just international order.

As a people, Indians have contributed a great deal to the advancement of knowledge. We value the positive role that the people of Indian origin have played in other countries. People of Indian origin are our cultural ambassadors wherever they live. We value their contribution to the societies they now live in just as much as we value the contribution they make to India, the land of their ancestors. Indians abroad are our "Brain Bank". They have shown how enterprising we Indians can be if the environment is conducive. If the required infrastructure is provided and individual initiative is rewarded we can be as good as the best in the world.

At home, this is the challenge for our Government. To create the environment in which merit is recognized, hard work and creativity are rewarded.

My dear countrymen, brothers and sisters, there are many things we must do in government to be able to meet your needs and fulfill your aspirations. This is a responsibility we have taken upon ourselves and as your representatives in government we are ultimately answerable to you. This is the essence of a democracy and I have accepted this responsibility with all humility.

The power of the people, however, is infinitely greater than the power of governments. But, it is by combining the two that we can make our nation truly great. However, as I have said already, there are limits to how much the government can do. Part of the solution lies in each one of us, in our families, in our communities. If we can all cooperate with one another and

work together as a community there is much we can do without looking for intervention by the government. We have to revive the spirit of community service and the spirit of nationalism, especially among our youth.

Our national movement is unique in world history because we secured our freedom through non-violent means and by igniting hope in the minds of ordinary people. Generations of young people have been inspired by the Mahatma, a frail and soft-spoken man who shook the foundations of the mighty British Empire.

I want our youth to understand Mahatma Gandhiji's message that each one of us has the power to do good for our nation if we are only so determined. Let us all work together to revive that spirit of idealism, self-sacrifice, discipline and unity of purpose that characterized our freedom struggle. I am confident that the people of this great nation have the will, determination and the resources to meet this challenge. India's destiny beckons us to pool all our wisdom, experience and knowledge to make this future happen.

I am confident that this is possible and within our reach. Our government will do all that lies within its power to convert this dream into a living reality so that this ancient land of Bharat once again becomes a major powerhouse of both knowledge and creativity. I commit our government to the fulfillment of this sacred national task.

Dear Children, join me now and say: Jai Hind! Jai Hind! Jai Hind!