

Sisters, Brothers and Dear Children,
Accept my greetings on the sacred occasion of Independence Day. This is a day of hallowed remembrance for us. This is a day of dedication for us.

This year's Independence Day has special significance for all of us. The present century is coming to an end. The world will have entered the next century by the time of the next Independence Day.

As we stand at the sunset of the 20th century, and look back at the events of the era that has passed, we see the end of colonialism from Indian soil to be the most important development. Our great leaders, and many generations of our countrymen, waged a powerful struggle for independence. By doing so, they paved the way for the independence of other countries, too.

We pay our homage to those self-sacrificing and devoted leaders and patriots who struggled for freedom throughout their lives, and, when necessary, even laid down their lives as aahuti (offering) in the great yagya of freedom.

Come, all my countrymen, let us strive to become worthy heirs to those great leaders. We dedicate today's sacred day to their memory.

In the same way, I offer my condolences to the valiant jawans, officers and others belonging to the Army and the Air Force, who displayed magnificent heroism and the spirit of sacrifice in recapturing that part of our Motherland in Kargil from the enemy. All of us bow our heads in gratitude for those who were martyred in the Kargil war.

Almost all our countrymen have seen on television glimpses of the impossible summits, which our heroes overcame and pushed out the enemy. To gain victory at such heights is not only to surmount the sky-piercing peaks, it displays the full might of the nation. It is a symbol of

the bravery of our Armed Forces.

How can we forget such heroes?

How can we forget those wounded soldiers whose only wish was: how can we get well and rejoin our battalion to repulse the enemy?

How can we forget the members of the families of those brave martyrs, who, on receiving the body of their beloved, said, ~We do not have tears in our eyes, we have pride in our heart~?

How can we forget the mother whose lament was that she had had only one son, and therefore, could not send another to fight for our country?

I know that mere words of solace are not enough. We have to take concrete measures for the families of the martyrs and wounded soldiers so that they may live a life of comfort and dignity.

It has been said that we remember and honour soldiers during a war, and in the immediate aftermath. But as the days pass, we forget them. And it is a sad fact that many who sacrificed their life and limb in previous wars were often forgotten. I give you my personal pledge that this will not happen again.

The Red Fort and its world-renowned ramparts are not merely a geographical spot. The very heartbeat of India's freedom struggle is linked to this fort and its ramparts. In the First War of Independence of 1857, this is where Bahadur Shah Zafar was held a prisoner.

Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose made this very fort the target of his campaign in 1943 and, blowing the bugle of Independence, gave the stirring call to his countrymen: ~Dilli Chalo, Chalo Lal Kile~

It is from this very fort that our first Prime Minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru hoisted for the first time, the tricolour of Free India in 1947.

More than half a century has passed. Today, we stand at the threshold of a new era.

Come, let us enter this new era united in step and united in resolve.

When I addressed you from this rampart last year, there was uncertainty and cynicism in the atmosphere. I was being asked:

Will we be able to withstand economic sanctions?

To what extent will we be able to ward off the economic crisis, which had struck the Tiger Economies of Southeast Asia?

Will the Government be allowed to carry on its work?

Today, speaking to a self-confident India, I declare:

Sanctions have lost their effect. They have become a thing of the past. We have dealt with them in such a way that they hardly had any effect on our economy.

We kept the South-east Asian economic crisis at bay;

Yes, the Government was brought down, but the country was not. It continued to march ahead, fulfilling the mantra of Charaiveti, Charaiveti (Move on, Move on). The Government continued to discharge its duty.

Most important, a war was imposed on us.

We have not just triumphed over difficulties, we have achieved much. In

spite of obstacles that were put in our way,

Our National Income has grown by 6 percent;

Having crossed 200 million tonnes, production of foodgrains is higher today than ever before;

Food stocks are higher today than ever. For this our kisans deserve our felicitations. Our agricultural scientists are also worthy of our praise.

Industrial production is reviving at an energetic pace;

The new initiatives which have been taken in infrastructure have infused a new purposefulness right across the economy;

At over 30 billion dollars our foreign exchange reserves are higher than ever before;

The Sensex in the stock market has risen to record levels. In spite of Kargil, our companies have been able to increase their market value by over Rs. 200,000 crore.

The off-take of cement for building houses is 22 percent higher than it has ever been; Facilities which were known only to the rich, to the few, and in our cities alone - insurance for their output, credit cards - are now available to, and are being taken advantage of by farmers and by others in our far-flung villages.

And we are stronger than ever. Pokharan has given us enviable strength and self-confidence AGNI-2 has been tested - in the face of pressure - and will be integrated into our defence arsenal.

PSLV and INSAT 2- E have been launched. What a feat our scientists have

accomplished: sending not just one, but three satellites on a single rocket far out into space, and placing each of them at the precise point in space, which had been fixed. This has been a magnificent achievement.

Yes, one thing has certainly come down. It is the rate of inflation. At 1.3 percent, this is the lowest rate in seventeen years.

There has also been a sea change in the way the world sees us. Last year we had taken a major step - Pokhran 2- which was essential for our security, a step which had been contemplated for long but which could not be taken because of the pressures which were put on successive governments.

Some did not agree with our assessment. Some even sought to portray us as an irresponsible nation. However today, within a year, in the councils of the world, ~India~ is synonymous with ~responsibility~

The world has seen that we will protect our national interest at all costs: whether it is in developing an atomic weapons capability, whether it is in developing missile - capability, whether it is in driving adversaries out of our land:

The world has seen that we will withstand all pressures that we will withstand all pressures that are intended to keep us from taking the measures that we consider necessary in our national interest;

Also the world has seen that whatever we do, will be for self-defence, never for aggression.

But the world has also seen that we are capable of doing so with utmost restraint, with utmost responsibility. These were the principles, which guided us when Pakistan forced the Kargil war on us. Our response was well thought out. It was so effective that it left the enemy stunned.

The world today has well realized that we would do whatever is required to protect our country.

The world has also understood that we would act with utmost responsibility and restraint even when so gravely provoked. This has raised the reputation of India in the international community.

The Lahore bus journey was taken to improve our relations with Pakistan. This made the world realize that we truly want peace and friendship. This journey was not a showpiece. It was a serious and well-considered move, which we made knowing fully well that there could be risks in it.

Our honesty made an impact on the international community. Later, when the bus to Lahore was taken to Kargil, it did not take much time for the world to realise that Pakistan not only violated the Shimla Agreement and the Lahore Declaration, but it also crossed the borders of trust and goodwill.

That is what turned the world's opinion. Pakistan stood completely isolated on the world stage. India received widespread support in the world for the first time.

I do hope that the people of Pakistan too will reflect on these events. We reached out to you with a message of friendship. What did we gain in return? Hundreds lost their lives. Relation severe spoilt. The resources which ought to have been used for economic and social development were instead spent on war.

We need peace in order to raise the standard of living of the people in both countries. For peace, we need trust. Has trust increased on account of all that happened in Kargil. Does the path of armed intrusion lead to friendship?

Terrorists are being trained in Pakistan. Camps are being run for them. Hordes of terrorists are being sent into India. They are killing innocent people. They are targeting women and children. How can meaningful dialogue take place in this atmosphere?

Pakistan must realize that no problem can be resolved if it continues to promote terrorist activities. We shall not let the evil designs of terrorists succeed. Today, Punjab is free of terrorism. The people of Jammu and Kashmir are fed up with terrorism. Even Assam and the North-East are affected.

All of us want peace. People are worried about the future of their children.

Terrorism is a curse on the world. When it is combined with religious extremism, it becomes a graver danger to humanity. All of you are familiar with the saying ~Karela Aur Neem Chadha~ (The bitterness of Karela is further worsened by adding to it the bitterness of Neem.)

In our case, over thirty five thousand of our people have been killed by terrorists. Terrorism has become a big problem in many other parts of the world, too. It is obstructing the path of peace and development. Today, there is a need to mobilise world opinion against terrorism.

Today, on the occasion of Independence Day, India stands with full self-confidence. Our gaze is turned to the future. Our standing in the world has risen. Now, the people are not attracted by the controversies and narrow disputes of yesterday.

Throughout the war in Kargil, I was specially satisfied by two features.

There was no communal tension anywhere in the country. Goodwill and brotherhood prevailed everywhere, including in Jammu & Kashmir. This

must have despaired those who thought that riots would break out in India as soon as the spark of war is lit. Those who hatched the conspiracy of strife, must have been truly disillusioned. The people of all sections of society worked for India's success in the war. A powerful wave of patriotism traveled everywhere.

When I went to Kargil and met our jawans, I saw our entire country there: soldiers from Nagaland, from Assam, from Tamil Nadu, from almost every state were fighting for the country. There was not the slightest distance between them on account of caste or religion or region.

This is the real India. We must make, their oneness our own. We have to live for this India. We have to work for this India. And, if necessary, we have to lay down our lives for this India, as our brave jawans did.

Kargil has once again shown that whenever our patriotism is aroused, all of us stand as one with full confidence and determination, as a fist clenched in conviction. We face our challenges unitedly. Our adversaries should beware of this.

At the same time, there is an equally important lesson for us. Now that the crisis has been beaten back, do not unclench this fist of unity.

The battle is not over. New challenges are knocking at our doors. The patriotism that coursed through the veins of Indians should be made a permanent feature of our lives.

All of us remember the talisman Gandhiji gave us: when in doubt about what to do, he taught us, think of the least, of the most helpless man you have seen, ask yourself, ~Will this step be in his interest?~ he said, and you will see all your doubts melt away.

Kargil gives us a second talisman: As we contemplate a step, let us ask

ourselves: ~Is it worthy of the soldier who gave his life on those mountains? Does the impulse which lies behind it measure up to the spirit which filled that soldier as he fought to protect our Motherland?~

The challenges that confront us cannot be overcome only by the men on the frontiers doing their duty. There is a need for an organized and disciplined nation to stand behind them. We must defend our country and develop our society by keeping national interests utmost in our minds. If our economy is not strong, and if we are not self-reliant in important matters of national security, then we cannot successfully face external challenges.

All of us, wherever we may be, whatever work we may be doing, we should discharge our responsibilities well. We must never allow any limb of our nation or society to become weak.

It is clear from the effective way in which we have overcome our challenges and dealt with our difficulties, that we can do anything if we resolve to do it. What is needed is to take a pledge: that whatever we can do, we will now do.

I have a vision of India: an India free of hunger and fear, an India free of illiteracy and want.

I dream of an India that is prosperous, strong and caring. An India, that regains a place of honour in the comity of great nations.

Come, let us build an India in which we have balanced development that benefits all regions and all sections of society. I note with regret that several regions in the country - including the North-Eastern States - have been the victims of unbalanced progress. The nation has an especially pressing obligation to bring the people of the North-East into the developmental mainstream.

Come, let us build an India in which Dalits, Adivasis, and Backward Classes are not only freed from economic deprivation, but also enjoy the fruits of social justice. The path that will take us to this ideal is the path of samata, mamata, and samajik samarasta.

Come, let us build an India in which our nari shakti - our women - are able to realize its full potential - from shaping the future of their families to shaping the future of the nation. It is our collective responsibility to empower them economically, socially, educationally and also politically. In this regard, I would like to see early passage of the legislation to reserve seats for women in Parliament and State Assemblies. We have already seen how women have given an excellent account of themselves wherever they have got an opportunity to serve in panchayats and other local bodies.

Come, let us build an India in which the minorities fully enjoy the fruits of national development, while having full opportunities to contribute to it. Our country belongs to all. And all are entitled to equal and fair treatment in the eyes of the law and the Government. India, which is home to the great secular principle of Sarva Panth Samabhav, fully guarantees the religious freedom of all communities. It is a matter of immense pride for India that all the religions of the world have a harmonious co-existence here. Unity in Diversity is our priceless heritage.

It is also a matter of much satisfaction that the past year has seen a record low in communal violence.

India is the largest democracy in the world. The tradition of democracy in our country is very old. When this Century opened, democracy was the preserve of just a handful of countries, and even in them it was limited to small sections of the people. Today there are just a handful who are still out of the pale of democracy. There is scarcely a country whose people do not aspire to it.

Come, let us strengthen Indian democracy. Let us make it an ideal for other countries of the world. Let us transform our political democracy into economic and social democracy.

Come, let us make India a nation of high achievers - in every sphere. In business and economy, in education, in science and technology, in arts and culture, and also in sports. Let us make India synonymous with ~achievement~, achievement of the kind that can be benchmarked globally. All of us are heartened by what our young men and women have achieved in recent times. The success stories of young Indians working abroad are making headlines almost every day. If young Indians can script such shining successes abroad, why shouldn't we create conditions for them to do so right here?

Come let us together build a Parishrami Bharat, a Parakrami Bharat, a Vijayi Bharat.

To realise this vision, let us step out of the swamp of negativity.

Let us not be obsessed with the past. Face the future.

March with confidence towards the goal.

Turn from problems - to solutions.

Today, when the 20th century is coming to an end, and the 21st century is knocking at our doorsteps, let us draw inspiration from our glorious past and resolve to build an even more glorious future.

Come, let us make good use of the natural and human resources of our Motherland, Bharat and make the 21st century, India's century.

We are inheritors of an ageless culture and a proud civilisation. Greatness

is our past - and also our future.

Come, let all of us together raise our voice in saying:

Jai Hind,

Jai Hind,

Jai Hind.