

Dear countrymen,

My hearty Independence Day greetings to all of you.

My felicitations,

To the brave soldiers of the three Armed Forces and to all our security forces.

To our hard-working kisans and diligent workers.

I greet our scientists, teachers, and our sisters and mothers whose awakening has unleashed India's Woman Power.

And, dear children, you are the future of our Nation. Lots of love to you, and my blessings.

Members of India's Diaspora, living in distant lands of the world, my good wishes to all of you. You may be far away from India, but you are always close to our hearts.

I wish to congratulate all our sportspersons, who did India proud in the recent Commonwealth Games. In particular, our women who have shown that they are in no way behind men. I am confident that Indian sportspersons will earn similar success in the Olympic Games.

Sisters and Brothers,

It is fifty-five years since we became independent. Today, we pay our homage to all the martyrs of the Freedom Struggle. We bow our heads before Mahatma Gandhi, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, and all other great leaders.

We salute our soldiers, jawans of paramilitary forces, and police personnel who laid down their lives in combating terrorism.

Our tributes also to the martyrs who foiled the terrorist attack on our Parliament on December 13.

Terrorism has become a festering wound. It is an enemy of humanity.

Our neighbour claims to oppose terrorism at the international level, but adopts double standards in the context of our region. After facing defeat in wars, it has resorted to cross-border terrorism for grabbing Kashmir.

We wish to state once again that Jammu and Kashmir is an integral part of India. It will remain so.

The world cannot accept that the cruel massacre of the Amarnath pilgrims, or the carnage of innocent women and children at Kaluchak and Kasim Nagar are a part of any ~Freedom Struggle~.

For us, Kashmir is not a piece of land; it is a test-case of Sarva Dharma Samabhava, secularism. India has always stood the test of a secular nation. Jammu and Kashmir is a living example of this. And this itself is Kashmiriyat.

We shall defeat cross-border terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir. This is our resolve.

We wish to have good neighborly relations with Pakistan. The Lahore Journey and the Agra Summit are a testimony to this.

India wants all issues to be resolved peacefully and through negotiations. We are prepared to take some more steps in this direction. However, for this, it is necessary to create a conducive environment.

Infiltration into Jammu and Kashmir continues even today. Those who call the forthcoming elections in the State farcical should not give us lectures on democracy. Let them take a look at their own track record.

How can attempts to flagrantly provoke the people of Jammu and Kashmir to boycott elections create an atmosphere for any meaningful talks. Instead of resolving problems, this will only exacerbate them.

Sisters and Brothers,

I am deeply saddened when I compare South Asia with other parts of the world. When Japan, which was devastated in the Second World War, today stands as one of the front-ranking nations; when the whole of Europe has united, forgetting all the old enmities; why can't we resolve all our contentious issues through talks?

We can. We will.

Why can't we unite and fight against our real enemy, the poverty?

This is a challenge. No one is going to come from outside and meet it for us.

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The process of peace and democracy has now arrived at a decisive turn in Jammu and Kashmir, which has been grappling with terrorism.

Elections are going to take place in the State. The dates have already been announced.

I am confident that these elections will be fully free and fair. No one need

have any doubts on this score.

I appeal to the people of Jammu, Kashmir, and Ladakh, as also to their representatives to participate actively and in large numbers in the elections and thereby demolish the motivated propaganda being conducted from across the border.

No one will be allowed to create disturbances in the elections in Jammu and Kashmir. All the designs to create an atmosphere of fear will be frustrated.

The people of Jammu and Kashmir want to live in peace. For many many years they have seen and suffered violence and bloodshed. They want to create a future for their children.

My brothers and sisters in Jammu and Kashmir, today is an opportunity when we can together heal these wounds. Together, we can participate in the creation of a happy Jammu and Kashmir.

I would like that no citizen of the State feels alone and helpless. The entire Nation is with them.

I am confident that all the displaced people, including Kashmiri Pandits, will be able to go back to their homes with respect, in the new situation that will be created after the elections.

I wish to assure the people of Jammu and Kashmir that if any mistakes have occurred, we shall make amends. For this, we shall talk to the elected representatives and organizations. Discussions will also take place on the demand for more powers to the State.

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The desire for peace is growing in India's North-Eastern States too. The demand for faster economic development is intensifying.

People are realizing the fact that the gun can snatch away life, but it cannot make people's lives better.

Our efforts for permanent peace in Nagaland are progressing towards success. We invite all those who have taken to the path of violence in other North-Eastern States for peace talks.

Sisters and Brothers,

In addition to external difficulties, we also have had to grapple with nature. A large part of the country is reeling under a severe drought. In some places, floods have shown their wrath.

Standing crops are wilting, sown seeds have gone bad. Kisans are concerned. We share their concern.

The Government has taken every possible step to deal effectively with the drought. Our godowns are brimming with foodgrains. We will not let anyone die of hunger.

Relief is being reached to the weaker sections of society by extending the scope of the Antyodaya Anna Yojana. Under the Rs. 10,000-crore Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana, drought relief programmes are being speedily implemented. Five thousand crore rupees have been given to States to undertake various ~Food-for-Work~ activities.

Prices of essential goods are under control.

But all these are temporary measures.

The Government is now preparing an effective, long-term strategy to protect the country from the curse of drought and floods.

We will make concerted efforts to save every drop of water. We will have to adopt watershed management, rainwater harvesting, and all such techniques.

We will shortly unveil a new initiative, which will be called Pradhan Mantri Grameen Jal Samvardhan Yojana.

We shall soon start three important programmes:

One lakh hand-pumps will be installed in water-scarce areas;

One lakh primary schools in rural areas will be provided with drinking water facilities; and,

One lakh traditional sources of drinking water will be revived.

Dear Countrymen,

With your trust, affection, and support, I am in front of you for the fifth consecutive year on the ramparts of Red Fort.

There is stability in the country today. People want the experiment of coalition governance to succeed.

Democracy has become stronger. Its roots have reached every village and town. After Independence, thirteen elections to the Lok Sabha have taken place. Governments have been formed and changed, but always without any bloodshed and violence.

My Government is committed to carrying out electoral reforms. It is our firm

resolve to keep criminal elements away from power.

Dear Countrymen,

Today, India stands proudly on the world stage: tall, self-reliant, and full of self-confidence. Our prestige is on the rise internationally.

It is necessary that we do not overlook our achievements. Undoubtedly, our progress in certain areas has been tardy. We have to honestly introspect on this. For, we have the potential to achieve much more than what we have achieved so far.

Sometimes, we tend to talk about our shortcomings much more than is necessary. This gives rise to disappointment. The Nation's energy dissipates.

On the other hand, the feeling of national pride inspires us to work to achieve more.

We are proud of our kisans. Until a few years ago, we had had to import foodgrains from abroad. Last year, we exported foodgrains worth Rs. 6,400 crore.

We are proud of our scientists and engineers. They successfully launched into space not only Indian satellites, but also satellites of other countries.

We are proud of our entrepreneurs in the computer industry. Could anyone have even imagined that one day, India would earn Rs. 40,000 crore in computer software exports? But it has happened.

Behind these achievements, is the talent, the hard work, and the determination of us Indians. The credit for this goes especially to the youth of our country. Come, let us congratulate our younger generation for this.

Sisters and Brothers,

We have a multi-party system. The race for power is natural in this system. However, this race has to remain within the limits of the ~Nation First~ principle.

We will have to draw a Lakshman Rekha in our political conduct. This must never be crossed for temporary gains.

Today, there is consensus among political parties on issues of national security. Then, why can't we create a similar consensus on certain pressing issues of social and economic development?

We can create this consensus. We must create this consensus.

Take for example, the problems in the power sector. The scarcity of electricity has assumed crisis proportions in many States.

I appeal to all political parties to arrive at a consensus on the minimum agenda for power sector reforms.

However, it is not enough to change the mindset of political parties. It is also necessary to bring about a change in the mindset of the people.

Just think of the extensive theft of power, and of the Rs. 25,000 crore that is lost through it every year. How can this be tolerated?

Today, kisans want quality power; they are willing to pay more if the power supply is uninterrupted. But there should be no interruptions and cuts and no impediments in its transmission to the desired destinations.

Countrymen,



The economic reforms that have been implemented in the past few years are in front of you. An economy of scarcity has been transformed into an economy of surplus.

Today, there are no crowds in front of ration shops.

There are no lines for gas and telephone connections

The queues for kerosene have become shorter.

Prices of vegetables may have risen in rainy season, but we have strived to keep onion prices in check!

Telecom and Internet services are available to more and more people. Their rates too are continuously falling.

Our chief objective of economic reforms has been to remove poverty speedily. We are moving rapidly in this direction. The living standards of the common man are rising. Today, a fan, a TV, a refrigerator, or a scooter can be seen even in poor localities.

My dream is to see that every family has its own house. In the past four years, we have initiated the process of construction of nearly sixty lakh new houses. Of these, 35 lakh houses are in rural areas and eighty percent are for poor families.

I dream of an India in which both the Government and Society are sensitive. Our policies and programmes have been formulated with this end in mind.

Brothers and Sisters,

Faster development of the infrastructure in our country is the need of the hour. We are fully determined to ensure that this happens.

A network of world-class highways is being laid across the country. The National Highways Development Project is being implemented rapidly. Rs. 55,000 crore will be spent on it. This is the biggest and most ambitious road project to be implemented in India after Sher Shah Suri's Grand Trunk Road.

Similarly, the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana, costing Rs. 60,000 crore, will link every village with an all-weather road in five years.

These two road projects are generating jobs for lakhs of people.

Dear Countrymen,

Our aim is to free India from the curse of poverty and unemployment. It is to make India a Developed Nation by 2020.

When this country of one billion people works with a common resolve, then no goal is impossible to achieve.

The Tenth Plan has set the target of eight percent yearly growth in GDP.

We are taking some important new measures for economic and social development. These will be announced separately today.

Sisters and Brothers,

I appeal to you to display the same emotional unity on the issue of National Development as you always do on the issue of National Security.

Come, let us make Development a powerful People's Movement.

For this, it is necessary that everyone rises above casteism and communalism. We will have to leave behind all those things that divide us.

The horrific explosion of communal violence in Gujarat was one unfortunate example of this. There can be no place for such violence in a civilized society.

We must maintain peace, communal amity, national unity and integrity even in the most serious and provocative of circumstances.

It is the responsibility of the Government and Society alike to provide security and equal opportunities for the minorities.

Countrymen,

Come, let us as a nation look ahead, look to the future.

Someone has rightly said:

~Beeti Tahi Bisar De, Aage Ki Sudh Le~

(Forget what happened in the past, look forward to the future.)

Rather than getting bogged down in the issues and disputes of the past, let us create a new future for ourselves.

All our programmes will succeed and all our dreams for progress will come true only when we strictly adhere to probity and morality in public life.

We will not compromise with corruption at any level. Those who are in high offices should remember that people expect equally high conduct from them.

While on the one hand, there is a need for those in politics and administration to change their behaviour, equally, our citizens need to change their attitude.

Do not talk only of your rights. Remember also your own duties and responsibilities.

The mindset of depending on the Government for every work has to change.

I call upon all citizens and voluntary organizations to come forward for social work.

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It is our collective responsibility to ensure that Dalits, oppressed, and people belonging to backward classes enjoy social justice and equality. We do not do them any favour by doing this.

My Government has extended the period of reservations for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in government service for another ten years. Their opportunities for promotion in government service have also been properly ensured.

These reservations are not a dole, rather they are an instrument for bringing about social equality.

My dear countrymen,

This fifty-fifth anniversary of Independence conveys one more message to us. And that message is that all of us strive to our utmost for the realization of the dream of making India a Developed Nation.

May our goal be the limitless heights of the sky.

May our feet be on the ground.

May our minds be full of unyielding determination.

May our hands be clasped together.

May our resolve be to march together.

If we do this, our victory is certain.

Come, let all of us unitedly affirm this resolve with the victorious salutation of Jai Hind.

Join me in saying thrice:

Jai Hind! Jai Hind!! Jai Hind!!!