

I open my hearty greetings to you on this auspicious occasion of the forty-fifth anniversary of independence. This year has got a special significance because we are celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of "Quit India Movement." We salute the people whose great sacrifices won independence for the country. We want to draw inspiration from them and wherever they are, whether in the country or abroad, I beseech their blessings on this occasion. We have undertaken a gigantic task which is really stupendous and our journey is very long but I am confident that with inspiration from them, our task would become easier.

Friends, I had spoken to you from here a year ago. I had then presented before you a brief outline of conditions prevailing, and the economic situation that we had inherited. A year has gone by in facing these challenges and I am happy to say that in our endeavour during the year we have achieved considerable success. I think that the conditions that you see today are vastly different from what they were last year. Today you can see a picture of stability in the country. There is no doubt that last year there were question marks about the stability but today no one inside or outside the country thinks that there is any instability. This picture of stability has been very helpful in carrying forward the programme of economic reforms and in maintaining social harmony that I had referred to last year. However, a lot remains to be done. You are aware that during last one year the country has not witnessed any upheaval that could have damaged or unsettled our social structure. Some small disturbances have erupted occasionally here and there and they were brought under control and today the overall situation is by and large peaceful. The stream of life is flowing peacefully and there are no storms. This is highly gratifying because this is the kind of environment that we need to move ahead on the path of progress.

Last year on behalf of the Government, I had adopted a new method of functioning through consensus. Now also I feel that this is the correct method for the country because the national problems are not problems of any particular party. They are problems which need to be placed above

party politics and these problems have their bearing upon the entire nation and, therefore, they have to be tackled accordingly. They can be resolved only by taking all the parties, sections and communities into confidence. I want to reiterate that we shall continue to adhere to it.

As far as the economy is concerned, we have achieved substantial success in this direction. You know the difficulties that we were facing last year so much so that we had to pledge our gold. The gold has since been brought back. Our foreign exchange reserves were not more than Rs. 1,000 crores and perhaps, within a week we would have defaulted and our credibility would have been ruined. We had to start from such a difficult situation. Very carefully and cautiously we took certain steps and today I am happy to say that our foreign exchange reserves have touched the peak of Rs. 17,000 crores and we have no difficulty in importing anything that we may require.

On the other hand, as a result of the measures taken during the year, our exports are showing signs of growth. On this front there were a few doubts but during the last month and a half I find that our exports have started rising. This means that our industries are operating, production is increasing and we are again in a position to increase our exports.

We have also succeeded in attracting foreign investment for industrialisation within the country. We have received proposals of the order of Rs. 3,000 crores. This investment may take a little time to actually materialise but this is a significant amount not only in terms of money but also from the point of view of technology. Along with this there are bright possibilities of greater investment of capital by our industrialists in the country.

The proposals that we have received indicate that there will be investment of about 35-40 thousand crore rupees from within the country which will give a big boost to our industrialisation.

Only a month and a half back, it was apprehended that rainfall may be subnormal and could create some difficulties. But now I understand that the country has had good rains and as a result, the crops are likely to be

good. And, therefore, we can hope that there will be general prosperity in the country and we would not have to face difficulties like drought.

Now, I want to present before you a few things relating to our policies and I think they should be clearly understood. First of all, I would like to tell you that we are engaged in a massive programme of country-wide economic reforms in the shape of Eighth Five Year Plan which envisages an outlay of about 4.5 lakh crore rupees. When we are engaged in such a large venture, it is absolutely essential that we should concentrate on that and our attention should not be distracted. It is possible that there may be some disturbances to divert our attention. Some of them may be on account of the circumstances but others will be due to a deliberate design. But, we have to overcome routine problems and concentrate our energies on development and progress and the Government is determined to do so.

Second point that I would like to present before you is that the Government is a powerful institution, but the question is for what end this power should be used. It is our belief and commitment that this powerful institution should be used for the protection of people who are powerless, who are weak and vulnerable and who are unable to protect themselves. Powerful people in the society can take care of themselves, but the Government must prominently help those who are not in a position to help themselves. But, when we want the Government to be the protector of the weak, we face certain problems in functioning, we must understand them.

For the last 40 years, we have been implementing Five Year Plans. Still, in whichever village we visit, we see development lacking there. School buildings or roads may be in a state of disrepair and there are many things about which people have their general complaints. These complaints are valid.

On the other hand there are big industries each having an investment of four to five thousand crore rupees and yet we do not get any return on this investment. We are not getting even the minimum profit or returns. It is a set back. Consequently, in both the areas, it is the people's money or the Government's money that is invested but we feel that neither sector is

performing well and delivering the goods and services. At the same time we continue to face shortage of funds for development in both the areas. The main reason is that we do not have enough funds in the country to invest in both the fields. This is nothing new. We have seen this during the period of Jawaharlal Nehru, Indiraji and Rajivji. During the period of all the Prime Ministers, we have experienced that capital available is not adequate to meet all our requirements. And, therefore, today we have to adopt a new approach.

Suppose we have to set up a big industry or a plant which needs 5000 crore rupees, then this is the people's money. But if we find some industrialist who is prepared to invest this amount of 5,000 crore rupees, then Government will be in a position to save this amount to invest elsewhere. I have worked out that if in this manner we can save 5,000 crore rupees from just one big industry, we can build one lakh primary schools. Thus if for these massive projects we could mobilise capital from outside or from other sources, our own money could be spent on all the needs of the poor. Just imagine if we can find some other sources for investment in infrastructure, in power projects, irrigation etc., our own people's money would be free for investment in rural areas to help those who are not so far getting the funds on the desired scale. This is a new approach. Not absolutely new, but the emphasis is new. We want that our own funds must be freed from the infrastructure sector by mobilising investment in that sector from other sources either within the the country or from the people of Indian origin settled abroad. If for power, irrigation, cement or steel plants we get investment from other sources, there will be rapid progress in both the rural and industrial sectors because development in both the fields is essential. Thus this programme of replacement of capital by arranging money for one sector from other sources is likely to be very advantageous. We will see that our rural programmes would gain momentum in the Eighth Five Year Plan. With great difficulty we could have provided 14,000 crore rupees for rural programmes for five years, but now we have decided that this outlay should be raised from 14,000 to 30,000 crore rupees. Thus you will see that we can step up the rural programmes

on a large scale.

I feel these programmes should move still faster. If instead of 30,000 crore rupees we raise this outlay to 50,000 crore rupees it would be still better. We are engaged in the efforts to ensure that the funds that are freed from investment in big projects and programmes are invested in villages.

Many people are nervous about the consequences of foreign investment in the country. I want to assert that after all, the plant will be set up in India. There is no possibility that projects built from foreign investment would run away from the country. If roads are built and railway lines are laid, they are bound to remain within the country and there is nothing to be apprehensive about it. Let us welcome all the investment that is available because this capital ultimately will be ours and we will derive benefit out of it. Anyone who makes investment would obviously like to make some profit and there should be no objection to this, as no one would like to invest if there is no profit in the investment. We should also make it a point to invest the capital that is freed from this investment, in rural programmes.

Now, I want to present before you some details about the programmes which we have undertaken for the poor during the last one year. Last year, I had submitted before you that we would undertake these programmes. I want to apprise you now that we have already started these programmes and they are progressing. First programme I told you was about 1,700 blocks where the population consists of very poor people. We want to undertake a new programme to make foodgrains available to them. I am very happy that this programme has been launched on a large scale from 1 January 1992 in 1711 blocks. I launched this programme from Rajasthan and now this is being taken up everywhere. There was a shortage of fair price shops. Within six or seven months we have opened 9,000 to 10,000 fair price shops. Perhaps during the next few months we are going to start 10,000 more. In addition, we are providing additional 20 lakh tonnes of foodgrains for such areas so that the deficit in supplies there is made up. We have linked this programme with Jawahar Rozgar Yojana.

We have made a special allotment of eight lakh tonnes of foodgrains for the purpose.

The intention is that under Jawahar Rozgar Yojana, part of the wages must be paid in the shape of foodgrains so that labourers do not face starvation. And it is our estimate that when part of the wages are paid in the shape of foodgrains each person would get two kg of rice or wheat per day and in this manner we would be able to overcome the problem of starvation in those areas.

Another problem that I talked about last year was about rural artisans still using outmoded tools. They are unable to increase their productivity and to get rid of their poverty. They are migrating to big cities, and a new problem is emerging there. I had said that to upgrade these tools we would be undertaking a large programme of modernisation. I am happy to say that this programme has already taken off. In the current year, we are going to implement the programme of equipping artisans in 40,000-50,000 villages with modern tools and this programme will continue during the next four to five years. It is a very massive but very useful programme because if the rural artisans do not stay in the village, the village would never prosper, and remain backward. Therefore, this programme has been launched.

Next I had said that the revenue records and the records of rights over land in our villages are not maintained properly. The result is that there is protracted litigation which often leads to bloody fights and therefore, a programme for their improvement was needed. I am happy to inform you that we have addressed ourselves to this task and a scheme has already been framed. We are going to call a meeting of Revenue Ministers to urge them to complete this job within a specified timeframe, may be a year or two.

About land ceiling I had said that whatever land is available with the Government under the ceiling laws and which has not been distributed would be distributed completely. This work has nearly been completed. Only a part of it is yet to be completed. On a large scale about two lakh acres of land has been distributed and it is our determination that within three to four months, we should reach a stage in which there should be no

undistributed surplus land. The entire land will be given to landless people. This programme will also be completed.

As declared last year, a corporation for the welfare of the backward classes has been set up. I am happy to inform you that this corporation has been started with a capital of Rs. 200 crore and a complete programme has been chalked out for the welfare of the backward classes.

The changes which are taking place at present could in some cases affect our workers in the industrial sector. To protect them from any adverse impact, we have set up a National Renewal Fund with a capital of about Rs. 2,200 crores. We would ensure that wherever our workers are adversely affected and wherever there is a problem of employment for them, we would extend full help to them out of this fund. We will also ensure that they face no difficulty and whatever programmes for their retaining etc., are needed, are funded out of this fund.

I would like to draw special attention of our farmers in far-flung areas where there is no electricity and perhaps where it is not possible to provide electricity in the near future. For such villages we have formulated a solar energy programme in the Five Year Plan with an outlay of Rs. 800 crores. Never before was so much attention paid and so much money provided for such a programme. This is largely because our Lord Surya is the biggest source of energy for us.

We should fully exploit this source. Here comes the question of technology. Theoretically this is possible, but, when the question of technology comes, it is said that these solar pumps are very costly and farmers cannot afford them.

On the basis of the results of experiments made by our scientists, it can now be said that by reduction in costs, we can bring them within the affordable limit of our farmers. Efforts in this direction have been successful and the result is that in our far-flung areas where there is no electricity, there will be "stand alone" units on wells, that is, each well will have a solar panel installed on it, along with the pump. The solar panel would draw energy from the Sun and convert this into electricity which would energise the pump. This programme would be undertaken on a large scale and this

would meet the energy requirements of the villagers. Whatever electricity is required for other purposes in the village will be generated there itself.

Wherever these experiments have been made, they have been very popular with the farmers. The reason is that normal electricity is not reliable because of its erratic supply, and therefore, it adversely affects agriculture. Hence, this new energy programme has appealed to them. I am happy to inform you that we are going to launch this programme on a large scale. I referred to Five Year Plans. We are going to undertake a massive programme of wasteland development because there are large areas of wasteland in all the villages. We are making efforts to develop them by planting trees and to make them green and fertile. This programme will provide employment to millions of people. With this in mind, we have set up a new department so that proper attention is paid to this programme. We have made a large financial provision for this in our Plan.

Now, I want to inform you that the programme we have launched during the last one year for the welfare of weaker sections and minorities have been carried out on a large-scale. For Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, a Corporation has been formed. For women, a National Commission has been set up. To make them fully effective to enable them to carry out their responsibilities, we have vested them with sufficient powers. Similarly, the Minorities Commission has also been given statutory status and vested with wide powers to protect interests of the minorities. Thus, this Commission is now as empowered as any other statutory commission. We hope that this would be very helpful and effective for the protection and progress of the minorities.

As I said just now, a Corporation has been set up for the backward classes; we want that the profession of safai karamcharis which is below human dignity should be abolished. In the Eighth Five year Plan, we have provided 560 crore rupees for this. There is no doubt that, if required, this provision can be enhanced. Along with this we have decided to constitute a commission to look into the problems of our safai karamcharis. This Commission is in a process of constitution and it would come into being in



the next few days. This will go a long way in understanding the problems of the neglected section of the society.

I would now like to dwell upon a few issues which we have inherited and which we are facing. You know about Punjab where after long years an elected Government has come into power. I am very happy that this Government is doing a good job and people are extending their full cooperation to it. I would also tell you in the context of Punjab that we are fully seized of the problems which have emerged there and we are very serious about finding solutions to them. There can be no hasty decision and we have to take every step with a cool mind in consultation with all concerned. Though some people say that nothing is happening, let me assure that this is not so. Shortly you will have an indication of what we intend to do and in which direction we are moving. In the meantime, law and order is being maintained effectively, and as you all know we have gained some successes. It is true that killings are still continuing. This is not a happy situation. It shocks us and hurts us. But when we are locked in this struggle, some losses are inevitable. But by and large the situation there is satisfactory and I am waiting for the day when complete peace will prevail in Punjab. It is a different thing that abetment from across the border is still continuing there. It is a matter of deep regret that despite our repeated pleas, our neighbour across the border is not desisting from such activities.

The situation has improved in Assam and there is no doubt about it. There has been significant improvement and those who were following the path of violence have decided to give it up and join the national mainstream. The majority of such people have come back and surrendered their weapons. But there are still a few of them who are carrying on confrontation. We have to tackle them and this is what is being done there. I hope that this situation would be brought under control shortly.

Kashmir issue is still hanging fire and the situation is taking uneven turns but an overall assessment would suggest that the things are under control. I am not satisfied with this because we cannot be satisfied till every corner of India comes within the democratic set up. I want to make it clear

that whenever the conditions are conducive there, we are keen to hold free and fair elections within the framework of Indian Constitution and to install a popular Government.

About the issue of Mandal Commission, I have already made my stand very clear. Right now the issue is before the Supreme Court. In due course, the judgement will come and it will be implemented. Government's stand is that backward classes must get 27 per cent reservation and among them between a poor and a rich candidate, the poor must get it first. But on the whole, the reserved jobs must be given to backward classes and should not go beyond. This is our decision. We also want to give 10 per cent reservation to those who are economically backward. The matter is before the Supreme Court and we will implement its judgement.

Now I come to an issue which was threatening to assume a dangerous shape sometime ago. I am grateful to those people who were involved in this and because of whose cooperation we could ward off this countrywide crisis. I am referring to the Ayodhya dispute. This is not just an issue of a temple or a mosque. I want to make it very clear that it would be misleading and wrong to view it purely as a problem of temple or mosque. This is a problem of unity of our country. Today the problem is to preserve and sustain the traditional harmony which has been existing for centuries in lakhs of villages of our country and the society. If we take a single wrong step, we must ponder over the consequences of such a wrong move for the country, leave alone the temple or mosque. Therefore, we have to take every step very carefully and with circumspection. Somehow we have been able to defuse it at a point where it had taken a dangerous turn. There is still some time available. Within this time limit we want to arrive at a settlement after consultation with all concerned. This is the consistent policy of the Government that a solution to this problem should be evolved through negotiations with all concerned. Such a solution must satisfy the religious sentiments of both the communities. For some reason if this is not possible, then the decision of the court would be binding on all. And in fact this is our formula in a nutshell. It is our desire that a grand temple should

be built there, but the mosque must remain intact. We would like to pursue this aim in our efforts. During the talks if it is possible to find a solution that is acceptable to all, then it would be a very happy development and none would object to it. The people of the country must know what the Government is doing and with what aim.

Now, I would like to say something about the international situation. Our relations with our neighbouring countries are improving very well. However, it is difficult to say the same thing in the context of Pakistan. I have had talks with the Prime Minister of Pakistan four times. Our talks have been very good, but when the time comes to take a step ahead, some development or the other takes place that leaves us where we were. Who is doing this? Why? And how? This is a matter of one's own conjecture. I think the talks will have to continue. But we should be very clear in our minds that Kashmir is an integral part of India and no power on earth can separate Kashmir from India. This is our basic position. If this is accepted, we can consider any other understanding or compromise required, and will continue to work for improvement in our relations. But this will be our bottom line. There should be no doubt about this.

With other countries like America, Britain, Germany, Japan etc., our relations are very good. Whatever new countries have come into existence after the disintegration of USSR, which was our close friend, our relations are very good with them. Their Heads of State have visited our country and I have also received invitations to visit their countries. Our relations with them are getting closer and friendlier.

India has to play a more active role in international relations. We have the Non-Aligned Movement. We have seen that there has been slight let-up in this Movement during these last two to three years. We will reactivate it.

Now, in the end I would like to make a few submissions. In this country where the majority of our people are honest and law abiding, there are also some corrupt elements. Some people indulged in loot and illegal deals in banks and the stock market. This episode surfaced suddenly and then we realised that before the lapses are covered up or the evidence

destroyed, action should be taken against those who are guilty.

As soon as the Government got the information, all necessary steps were taken. The persons have been arrested. A special court has been set up. The investigation is going on in full swing and let me assure you that whosoever is involved in this and whosoever is found guilty would be dealt with strictly and severe punishment would be awarded. As far as prevention of recurrence of such activities is concerned, it is now for the Parliament to decide about the preventive measures. A committee of the Members of Parliament has already been constituted and it has already started functioning. The Government would follow its advice. Let me once again assure you that in this country, to the extent it is within the power of the Government, there will be no place for corruption or corrupt people and no one would be spared whatever be his or her status. The law will take its course, no one can escape punishment according to the law. There will be no leniency in this regard. I would like to make it clear before you.

It is my appeal to you that we need peace for the next two to three years. In our country we have problems that bring the people together and there are also problems which divide the people. It is not possible that for the next two to three years, we declare a moratorium on raising such problems which divide us. These problems will remain, but we should forget about them. They may be raised again after sometime when controversies are resumed. But for the next two to three years, there should be no scope for such conflicts. All the problems are national problems and they affect the entire society. Of course, we attend to the problems which are already on hand. We can put aside new contentious problems. I hope that my appeal for a moratorium would be accepted by other parties also. If the people accept it, no one could refuse. It would be of immense help to the country.

I want to make one more submission. This is my promise: We will not take any hasty decision. Hasty decisions by the Government add later to the difficulties. When the decision is taken in a hurry, it may seem good, but adverse consequences have to be faced later and add to the

complications. Therefore, we would not do anything in a hurry. We will do everything after careful consideration. But every step we take, will be firm and once we move ahead, we will not retreat. Our approach will not be partisan approach. Our vision would be a vision for the good of the entire country and entire society. This is the approach that we want to follow.

I would appeal to you to give a serious thought to these three points. I wish that if we can develop a national consensus on these three points and if we move ahead together, then we shall be able to overcome the problems that we have inherited and not only this, but we would be able to make tremendous progress in taking the country ahead so that we may come up on par with other countries. If this does not happen because of our involvement in petty problems, we will remain backward. I want to submit very humbly that you must ponder over these aspects. If you all give your blessings to these three principles (Sutras), no one can dare oppose them. I want the blessings of my countrymen and their support for these three points which I am sure I will receive.

I have taken enough time. Yet, there are many things that I wanted to share with you, but I will have other occasions for that. Today, on this occasion, we have to move towards a future that is full of hope. There have been many happy developments and there have been less happy things too. They have to be dealt with. On the whole, the future appears to be full of hope and I call upon you and invite you to march forward towards that future and I seek the blessings of all of you.