

My dear Sisters, Brothers and Children,

I greet all of you on the occasion of the 51st Anniversary of our country's Independence. Half a century has passed still it appears as if it happened yesterday. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru had unfurled our beloved tricolour in the blue sky from this very spot for the first time. Since then it has been a tradition to unfurl the National flag from the historic Red Fort. I had never imagined that I shall have this good fortune one day. It is a symbol of strength and potential of the Indian democracy that the son of a school teacher hailing from the dusty and smoky environs of a village has the privilege of unfurling the national tricolour from the ramparts of Red Fort on this auspicious Independence Day.

We all know that independence did not come to us easily. On the hand, while tens of thousands of our countrymen and women suffered in jails during the non-violent freedom struggle under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, on the other hand, thousands of revolutionaries sacrificed their lives on the gallows. We owe our independence to these known and unknown martyrs and freedom fighter. Let all of us together pay homage to them and take a pledge that we shall defend our freedom, even if we have to sacrifice everything for this.

Our country has been subjected to foreign aggression. In this short period of 50 years, we had to face four aggressions. But we have safeguarded our independence and integrity. The highest credit for this undoubtedly goes to our soldiers. Away from their homes and dear ones, braving dangers all the time, they guard our frontiers day and night. This is why we are always reassured about our security. Be it the snowy expanse of Siachen with minus 32 degree Celsius temperature or the thick forests of the North-East, the deserts of Kutch or Jaisalmer or the deep waters of the Indian Ocean, our troops are vigilant everywhere. On our behalf I greet all these troops of the Army, the Air Force and the Navy and other security personnel. While congratulating them we must say ~O! Brave Soldiers, we are proud of

you!~

The Forces need our support. Our farmers and labour force have strengthened the second line of defence in the farms, the barns and the factories. We can never forget this. Lal Bahadur Shastri had said: Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan. One is incomplete without the other, unfulfilled without the other. I have added a new aspect to this: Jai Vigyan!

Pokhran Test

We can neither develop nor defend the country in the 21st century with the resources of the past century. We have to modernise our forces to enable them to face danger and safeguard our independence and integrity. With only this aim, we conducted the nuclear tests on the 11th and 13th of May this year. The tests of Pokhran were not the efforts of just one night. They were the results of years of hard work on the part of our scientists, engineers, technicians and the defence forces. I have only tried to further the work the foundation of which was credit by Smt. Indira Gandhi. I was only a means. The credit for this great achievement goes to our talented scientists and the hard work of our defence forces. I wish to heartily congratulate all of them on this auspicious occasion of this Independence Day.

I am even grateful to all of you for extending your full support in this trying hour. With a few exceptions every Indian, wherever he may be living, has welcomed this step. Holding our head high that day we proudly proclaimed "we are Indians". For that day in Pokhran, the might of the Nation manifested itself along with nuclear energy.

I wish to make it clear right now that India has always been an ardent advocate of peace and will always remain so. We know and want to see weapons for self-defence only. We would never use atomic weapons for attacking anyone. Hence, we have put a self-moratorium on any new

nuclear tests. We ourselves proclaimed to the world that we shall never be the first user of atomic weapons. We are doing it neither under pressure nor fear of any one. We are doing it voluntarily because of our firm belief in world peace and disarmament. Our dream is to see the world free from nuclear weapons and we want to see this dream come true. Initially, some countries did not appreciate our national security policy needs and doubted our intention. Some of them imposed economic sanctions against us. But now the situation is changing. The world is gradually appreciating the Indian viewpoint. We have been able to make them understand our position. As a result, some of the sanctions have begun to ease. We welcome this changing global attitude.

However, we also want to make one point clear. India is a great country and its people are powerful. The brave people of our country are always ready to face any danger to defend their honour. Our history bears testimony to this. No force on earth can deflect us from our chosen path. I am saying this not out of arrogance but with humility and self-confidence. We are willing to make any sacrifice to uphold the unity, integrity and sovereignty of our country. We wish to improve relations with our neighbours. We know that the easiest way to win a war is not to let it happen. We are ready to hold talks with Pakistan on any subject, at any level and at anytime.

You all know that I have taken the initiative during the SAARC Conference in Colombo. I am somewhat unhappy that we did not get the desired response. Still I have not given up. I will make another effort at reviving the dialogue during the Conference of the Non-Aligned countries in South Africa at the end of this month.

I believe that all problems of the world can be solved through talks. Therefore whether it is Pakistan or China, we will endeavour to solve our mutual problems through friendly talks. In the last few days terrorise activities have increased in Jammu and Kashmir. The massacre in

Himachal Pradesh appears to be part of a bigger conspiracy. Such terrorist activities everyday, from across the border, are like a proxy war.

Government has taken these incidents very seriously. We are facing them with all our might and we will not rest content until we have defeated these.

Time for Retrospection

Whether in personal or national life, the 51st anniversary is always a golden opportunity to assess the past fifty years. It is also the time for retrospection and preparation for a leap into the 21st century. While making an assessment we most often commit mistakes, tend to undertake our achievements and magnify our shortcomings which result in gloom.

Sometimes, I see a growing tendency of pessimism in the country. There may have been aberrations here and there but things have not gone that bad so as to defy solutions. Our scriptures say that only fools indulge in self-praise. But unnecessary self-condemnation is also like suicide. I want that a realistic assessment of the last fifty years should be undertaken.

National Integration and Secularism

When we attained Independence, some Western experts had forecast that we were unfit for being a democracy and did not deserve freedom. They said we would soon disintegrate. But, today, we can say with pride that we have not only safeguarded our integrity and independence but have also shown to the world how the biggest democracy can be governed. Almost all the countries which gained freedom along with us have kept the democratic tradition alive. This is our 12th Lok Sabha and I am the 11th Prime Minister of India. We have seen over the years transformations taking place from the tiniest village Panchayat to the Parliament. You all deserve credit for this. Your political maturity in all these elections have baffled political pundits. I congratulate you for this. Our democracy is safe as long as you remain vigilant.

On the occasion of the golden jubilee celebrations of our Independence, the Nation has to address itself to the important fact that Independence, national integration, democracy and secularism are complementary to each other.

We have to remain independent under all circumstances. An essential condition for this is national unity. Democracy is necessary for national unity. Secularism and democracy are inseparable parts of national unity. I and my Government are committed to all these four elements.

We oppose communalism in any form. We will ensure full security of the minorities and guarantee their participation in development. We should never forget that we are the citizens of one country. The boundaries of this country extend from Ladakh to Nicobar, from Garo Hills to Gilgit. Ours is a country whose civilisation and culture is more than five thousand years old. Such a big country replete with varieties of language, faith, living and food habits has resolved to achieve social and economic justice within the framework of democracy. Simultaneously, we cannot forget that we have to strive to rid this democracy of aberrations. Our legislators behave in such a way in legislatures that even a schoolteacher would not tolerate system of Governance through free debate. The opposition has the right to criticise and Government has the right to implement. The opposition and the Government are complementary to each other and adversaries.

Fearless and impartial voting has to be further strengthened. The electoral system has to be reformed to free it from casteism, violence, money power and other ills so that in the next century our system of governance is further refined.

Title of "Food Providers"

Once upon a time, this country was a land of prosperity. The situation

deteriorated and we began to be counted among the poor nations of the world. In the past few years our farmers and agricultural workers have worked very hard to make the country self-sufficient in foodgrain production. An army with an empty stomach cannot fight and a hungry nation cannot have a restful sleep. Our farmers have made the country self-sufficient to justify their being called “Food Providers”. I can only pray to God that He shower happiness on the “Food Providers”.

There is a shadow of sorrow in this happiness. Today the condition of our “Food Providers” has become difficult. I feel very pained that this year in some states some farmers have had to commit suicide because they could not bear the burden of their debts. I offer my condolences to the bereaved families. As a tribute to these farmers I have taken a decision. The Crop Insurance scheme will be broadened, new crops will be brought within its purview and its geographical reach will be creased.

A high-powered Commission will be formed to look into the real financial condition of farmers and to improve their economic condition. I want to assure our farmer brothers who are the backbones of the Nation that they will never suffer under this Government.

Easy to Say, Hard to Achieve

In Orissa, hunger still stalks the people in places like Balangir, Kalahandi and Koraput. It is unimaginable that even 50 years after independence some people are still stalked by hunger. I have told the Planning Commission that the outlay on the Employment Assurance Scheme in these areas should be doubled. My efforts will be to ensure that no one dies of hunger. The country has made commendable progress in business, industry and services. Some of our industries are making their mark on the international scene. I congratulate all the workers, employees, managers, industrialists and businessmen for this achievement.

But we know that this achievement is only a stepping stone. It is not the attainment of the final goal which is to see the rise of India as an economic superpower. I know that saying this is much easier than doing it. For this, We will need to follow the path of hard work, establish high standards and depend on self-reliance. We will have to produce goods of international standard, which can compete in the global markets. Economic reforms will have to be speeded up. But we will not allow others to take undue advantage of our liberalisation. We will implement infrastructure projects with speed.

“Swadeshi” does not mean an inward looking policy. The word has become a global village. Each one is dependent on the other. In this open market system we can use our inner strength to stand up to global competition and I have faith that we will.

This 51st Independence Day is being celebrated not only in India but also round the world. Every person of Indian origin in every country is celebrating this sacred occasion with joy and enthusiasm. I give my good wishes to every person of Indian origin round the globe on this occasion. In some countries our brothers and sisters are watching it live on television.

Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) have brought strength to the economies of the nations where they have settled. Now they have an opportunity to strengthen India's economy. We have floated the Resurgent India Bond (RIB). Non-Resident Indians around the world are taking benefit of this opportunity. So far, the scheme has brought in Rs. 5,000 crore. I am confident that Non-Resident Indians will take further advantage of this scheme.

We will have to solve these problems. I know that all of you, especially our sisters, are feeling the pinch of the rising prices of some commodities. I understand your problem. Nature is to be blamed more for this than the Government. But I know that by saying this your burden will not be

lightened. The Finance Ministry and the State Governments will work together to combat the price rise. I also ask for the cooperation of traders. They should not indulge in hoarding or profit- making. We will not hesitate in taking strong measures against such elements. I know that a number of festivals are coming up in the next few days. My efforts will be able to see that rising prices do not dampen your festive spirit.

Problem of Corruption

The country faces another problem that of corruption which is eating into the vitals of the country like cancer. We have decided to fight it. We have begun the fight from the top. I have not even left out the Prime Minister from the ambit of the Lok Pal Bill, which was recently introduced in the Lok Sabha. This has made clear our intentions to fight corruption at the highest level.

Along with this, we wish to fight corruption in the bureaucracy. Very soon, I will initiate action to speed up work in the cell in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) which is looking into corruption cases against officials. Removal of unemployment is an important pledge in our National Agenda. It is affecting the lives of everyone. Employment is the only way of fulfilling the basic needs of the people. Creation of schemes for total employment is difficult, but not impossible. But basic needs and services will have to be produced by the masses. Science and technology will have to be applied for this.

Government has decided that ten crore people should get employment opportunities over the next ten years. This means that every year one crore people should get employment opportunities. A task force will be set up for this purpose and it will present its report soon.

Reservation for Women

The status of women is a good indicator to judge the progress of a modern

society. We had promised to give women 33% reservation in Parliament and the Assemblies. We are sorry that we have not been able to fulfill this so far. We have already decided to provide free education to girls up to graduation levels. Now we are going to take another major initiative. All girls at the primary level will be provided books in their curriculum free of cost. This will cost Rs. 550 crore to the Government.

Rajrajeshwari and Bhagyashree Yojana

A new Insurance Scheme, “Rajrajeshwari” will be started to provide women the economic security. Another insurance scheme, “Bhagyashree” will be started for girls. Both schemes will begin on Diwali Day this year. The premium for the scheme will be Re. 1 per month. And the policyholder will be able to get Rs. 25,000 in case of emergency. The full details will be announced soon.

Speed up Implementation of Reservation in Jobs

Reservation in jobs has already been provided to the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes. However, implementation of these provisions is very slow. My Government's efforts will be to speed up the implementation process and to fill the reservation quotas as quickly as possible. The administration will be made more sensitive and accountable to these classes.

National reconstruction Force

Youth power is the strength of the nation. It is also the future of the nation. Many years ago I had read the words of Baba Amte ~Haath lage nirman mey, nahin mangne, marne.~ (Use your hands to create, not to ask or hit). This is also our wish. The young girls and boys of India do not have to extend their hands before anyone, nor do they have to use their hands against anyone. They should only dedicate themselves to the task of

national reconstruction.

For this purpose, we have decided to form the National Reconstruction Force (Rashtriya Punarnirman Vahini) which will involve youth from 18 to 35 years of age. This force will focus on basic services in the rural and agricultural sectors, protection of environment, mass movement for population, control, fight against drugs, spread of education, uplift of dalit and tribal women and in the field of sports, art and culture. These youth will also get honorarium for their work. Initially this scheme will be implemented in some districts and finally will be extended all over the country.

This scheme will be launched on January 12, 1999 which is the Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekanand and which is celebrated as the Youth Day. I call upon the young men and women of this country to donate one year of their youth to rejuvenate the nation.

Golden Jubilee Education Development Space

Satellite Scheme

The next millennium is beckoning us. It will be century of Information Technology. The greatest strength of India is its intellect. India has the third largest trained manpower in the field of Science and Technology. We will have to tap this strength. My Government has taken several new initiatives in the field of Information Technology. It is our ambition that the country should become a super power in this field.

Keeping this in view I am announcing a new initiative. Space is a new race an opportunity to look for innumerable possibilities in the coming century. Space technology has many advantages, which India can utilise to meet the aspirations of its younger generation. On the basis of the slogan “Jai Vigyan”, my Government wants to fulfil the dreams of our youth. In this direction we will start programmes on a new satellite named Swarn

Jayanti Vidya Vikas Antariksh Upagraha Yojana (Golden Jubilee Education Development Space Satellite Scheme).

The first satellite of this programme - INSAT 3-B - will be assembled and launched before August 15, 1999 by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) within a record time of less than twelve months. Six transponders of this satellite will be available exclusively to execute "Operation Knowledge" which aims to provide computer, internet and computer based education to all the students of the country. All Universities, engineering and medical colleges, research laboratories and other centres of higher learning particularly will be linked to the Information Technology Network before the next Independence Day. This programme will also fulfil the development related information needs of the states.

Economic and Social Independence

Today 125th birth anniversary celebrations of Maharishi Aurobindo are coming to a close. He visualized the spiritual, moral and cultural renaissance of the country. Today we should pledge to fulfil his dreams.

Bharat Ratna Baba Saheb Ambedkar once said that political freedom is incomplete without economic and social freedom. Today, on our political Independence Day we cannot forget this moot point. In the half-century gone by, we have been able to keep intact our political independence but could not win the battle of economic and social independence. We have not been able to free the country from the clutches of poverty and unemployment. The stigma of illiteracy could not be erased. The monsters of casteism and communalism still are raising their ugly head. Today on India's 51st Independence Day, let us pledge to win economic and social independence.

Cauvery Accord

In the short tenure of my Prime Ministership, I have made an effort to take everybody along and I have practised the politics of consensus. Take the example of Cauvery. There was dispute for years on sharing of Cauvery water among Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Pondicherry. On some occasions, this dispute took a serious turn. Water is used to extinguish fire but if water itself is on fire, what could be done! There is a solution. The solution lies in maturity, harmony, tolerance, patriotism and a willingness to keep others interest in mind. The recently concluded Cauvery Accord epitomises all this.

Is it not surprising that a large amount of water of our rivers flows away into the ocean, while we fight over our share of water? These disputes have been going on for years. This situation has to be changed. Our rivers, which link the states of the country, have to link the hearts of the countrymen too. There is a need to formulate a National Water Policy. We have promised to formulate such a policy. However, it is possible only with everybody's cooperation and patience.

National Agenda for Governance

My Government has been seriously endeavouring to fulfil the promises made in the National Agenda for Governance. Ours is a coalition and such Governments have their own character which has to be faithfully adhered to. We have prepared a common programme that is the national agenda for our alliance. We have kept all contentious issues out of this arrangement. We have always held national interest to be above the party and personal interest.

The country is passing through a transitional phase today. Our political and administrative system is facing a serious challenge. In such a situation every party and every leader has to conduct himself with a sense of responsibility. History will not forgive us for any action which hurts the nation.

The common man should also ponder over the existing political and administrative set up. We are faced with some basic issues. Are frequent elections in the interest of the country? Is it the nation's interest to incur heavy expenditures on frequent elections?

No Compromise on Principles in Pursuit of Power

I have been Prime Minister only for five months. We have a very thin majority in the Lok Sabha. I am aware of the limitations of the coalition Government. I am also aware that in today's system an innocent sage can be hanged by the power hungry.

I can assure you that I have never compromised on principles in pursuit of power and I will never do it. Being in power or out of power is the same for me. I had been in opposition for years and faithfully performed my duties. My opponents have also commended it. Today, a poem of Dr. Shiv Mangal Singh Suman comes to mind:

(I am not afraid of victory or defeat; whatever comes my way on the path of duty, I will accept it as it is and would not ask for any favours).

I wish to assure you that till my last breath I will neither ask for favours, nor give up the path of struggle. I only need your support. I only need the blessings of one billion of my countrymen. There comes a moment in life when one stands at crossroads and ponders over the path to take.

(Modesty is being enraged openly and pawn has beaten the queen, should I take one last gambit or leave it all, which path do I take?).

Then I feel that I cannot go into oblivion leaving the challenges behind. I have to struggle. Once again, I reiterate my pledge in your presence from the ramparts of Red Fort.

(I will not accept defeat and will start the struggle afresh. I will write and unwrite my own destiny and sing a new tune).

Thank you very much. Join me in saying:

Jai Hind