

My dear countrymen, brothers, sisters and my dear children

Greetings to all of you on this happy occasion of our Independence Day. This is a sacred day for every Indian. Today we remember the sacrifice of those who under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi fought for our freedom from foreign rule. Today we remember the hard work and dedication of all those who have toiled to build a free and modern India. And we re-dedicate ourselves to that cause. We remember our farmers, our workers and our teachers. We remember our soldiers - who defend our borders in snowy mountains, in deserts, in jungles, on the shores and in the oceans.

Brothers and Sisters,

Four years ago, on this day, I stood here before you and spoke to you about our Government's new vision for a new India. I said to you that it is our desire to build an India that is just and humane; an India that treats all its citizens as equals;

an India that is prosperous; an India that lives in peace; an India in which everyone can find work suited to his or her talent and can work for his or her brighter future. An India that is secular, that is fair and just to all its people. An India united in its diversity. It has been our sincere endeavour to work for the building of such an India.

Brothers and Sisters,

Four years ago I stood here and said to you that I have no promises to make, but I have promises to keep. The implementation of the National Common Minimum Programme, was our promise to keep;

To give a "new deal to rural India", was our promise to keep;

To make our economy and society inclusive was our promise to keep;

To take India to its rightful place in the comity of nations, was our promise to keep;

It has been the sincere endeavour of our Government to keep each of these promises. We have given a new deal to rural India. Through the Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana we are investing Rs. 25000 crore in agriculture; To provide relief to our debt distressed farmers we have waived loans taken from the banks amounting to about Rs. 71000 crore; In the past four years we have increased bank credit for agricultural sector from Rs 81000 crore to Rs 225000 crore, and have reduced the interest rates for farm loans; In order to improve the economic conditions of farmers we have steeply increased the procurement prices for food grains; 50% for wheat and 30% for paddy; The National Food Security Mission has been set up to enhance production of rice, wheat and pulses; Irrigation, watershed development, rainfed areas development, and flood management have received our special attention; Our effort at increasing investment in rural areas and reducing the debt burden of farmers has turned our agricultural economy around.

After almost a decade of stagnation especially from 1998 to 2004, investment in agriculture is increasing and there has been a revival in this area. We have had record production of foodgrains, cotton and sugar in 2007-08. Our farms are once again green. Our godowns are once again filling up. Our farmers are once again hopeful about their future and their welfare.

Brothers and Sisters,

I spent the first ten years of my life in a village that had no electricity, no drinking water supply, no doctor, no roads and no phones. I had to walk many miles to a school. I had to study at night in the dim light of a kerosene lamp. After independence there has been considerable development in

rural areas, yet many of our citizens still live a life that I lived in my childhood.

That is why when our Government took over, we launched Bharat Nirman, to build rural infrastructure. Our Government is committed to transforming rural India. In these four years we have taken important initiatives. I am confident that a new and prosperous India will be built due to our efforts.

My dear Countrymen,

Four years ago I spoke to you about our "Seven Sutras" - the seven priorities for our Government - agriculture, water, education, health care, employment, urban renewal and infrastructure.

In each area we have taken important initiatives. I have already spoken about our initiatives for agricultural development and farmer's welfare.

The second important area of development has been infrastructure development. There is a new dynamism in our railways. New roads are being built. New seaports and airports are being developed. More and more of our people now live in our cities. The Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Mission has been funding urban development and modernization of our cities. The National Rural Health Mission has been expanding public health facilities and services in rural areas.

As someone who started his professional life as a teacher, I feel proud to say that our Government has been giving special attention to the development of education in our country. There is a massive increase in public investment in education at all levels. In elementary education, in secondary education and in higher education.

We have strengthened Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and expanded the mid-day meal programme upto upper primary level in all districts of the country.

About 14 crore children are being provided mid-day meals under this scheme. We are establishing 6000 new high quality model schools, with at least one school in each block. 373 new colleges are being opened in backward districts. We are opening 30 new universities, 8 new IITs, 7 new IIMs, 20 new IIITs, 5 new Indian Institutes of Science, 2 Schools of Planning and Architecture, 10 NITs, and a 1000 new polytechnics.

I have called the 11th Five Year Plan our "National Education Plan". We want every section of our society to get access to education. Every child belonging to a family of SC, ST, OBC and all Minorities, every single child, boy or girl, must have access to modern education. Our Government is implementing several new scholarship schemes for the educational development of our children. Schemes for pre-matric and post-matric scholarships for children hailing from SC, ST, OBC and Minority families are being implemented. Special scholarships for meritorious students from SC, ST, OBC and Minority families have also been launched. Scholarships for overseas studies are being given to SC and ST students. National merit-cum-means scholarships for children hailing from economically weaker sections and children with disabilities have also been approved.

We have established a new Skill Development Mission which will work under the supervision of the Prime Minister. A Skill Development Corporation will be created by the Government with the active participation of the private sector to give special training to our young men and women, our workers and our technicians.

I am happy to say that we are sincerely implementing most of the recommendations of the Justice Sachar Committee Report on social, economic and educational empowerment of our Muslim community.

India will be transformed only when every Indian is literate, well fed, healthy and can secure gainful employment. I want to see a modern India, imbued by a scientific temper, where the benefits of modern knowledge flow to all

sections of society. This year we hope to send an Indian spacecraft, Chandrayan, to the moon. It will be an important milestone in the development of our space programme.

Brothers and Sisters,

Providing employment has been a special priority for us. Our policies for agriculture, for industry, for infrastructure development and for skill development, will all promote employment. Our beloved former Prime Minister Shrimati Indira Gandhi had said, "Garibi Hatao". Our leader Shrimati Sonia Gandhi has given us the slogan, "Rozgar Badhao". Our Government is making special efforts to create "rozgar" to fight "garibi".

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme is a historic initiative of our Government. Today the entire country is covered by this programme. The NREGA is providing minimum livelihood support to the crores of neediest among us. It is aimed to soften the sharp edges of poverty. To create more employment we need more investment in agriculture, in manufacturing and in infrastructure. We need a new wave of industrialization to generate more employment. If industrial development has any adverse impact on some of our rural folk, we will ensure that there is reasonable compensation and proper rehabilitation. A new Rehabilitation and Resettlement Policy has been formulated and we will seek Parliament's approval for it.

We have introduced a bill in Parliament to provide social security to the workers of the unorganized sector. Our Government has launched the Aam Aadmi Beema Yojana, under which one member of each landless family in rural areas will be insured. We have also started a programme to provide health insurance to Below Poverty Line families of workers in the unorganized sector. Citizens above 65 years of age, living below the poverty line are being covered under the Indira Gandhi Pension Scheme.

My dear countrymen,

In the past four years we have seen a sharp increase in the rate of investment. This has contributed to an increase in the rate of growth of the economy. For the first time in history, we have had four years of nearly 9.0% economic growth. India is among the world's fastest growing economies.

But there are new challenges that we face. We have the challenge of inflation. I know how much each one of you is concerned about the recent rise in prices. The inflation we have seen this year is basically due to external factors. All over the world and in global markets the price of food, fuel and other commodities has been rising. In many developing countries the rate of inflation is double that in India. Our Government has worked hard to ensure that in India the rate of inflation is not as high as in many other countries. We have also taken special measures to insulate the poorer sections of our society from the full impact of rising food and fuel prices. Our Government has not raised the price of kerosene and fertilizers. We have not raised the issue price of wheat and rice under PDS.

We are taking determined measures to bring prices under reasonable control. I have urged all Chief Ministers to improve and strengthen the PDS to ensure availability of essential commodities to the common man at reasonable prices. The Reserve Bank of India is moderating the growth of money supply in the country so that inflation can be controlled. However, while making these efforts we should avoid doing anything which hurts our growth.

Brothers and Sisters,

Today, while speaking about the achievements of our Government, I wish to make one more promise. We have done much, but I realize that there is more to do. The problem of malnutrition is a curse that we must remove.

Our efforts to provide every child with access to education and to improve health care services for all citizens will continue. We need to take forward our initiatives for giving equal status to women and for their social and economic empowerment. I promise to you that we will continue striving for the development and prosperity of our country. We will work hard to take the country to greater heights in all fields.

Brothers and Sisters,

We must apply modern science and technology to find long term solutions to our energy problem. Our crude oil and gas reserves are limited. We must find alternative energy sources. I would like our scientists and engineers to find ways in which we can make better use of solar energy, wind energy, bio-gas and other sources of energy.

Our economy must grow at the rate of at least ten per cent every year to get rid of poverty and generate employment for all. A basic requirement for sustained growth, and for the development of our agriculture and industry is availability of energy, particularly electricity. All over the world, there is growing realization of the importance of atomic energy to meet the challenge of energy security and climate change. It is a clean, environmental friendly and renewable source of energy.

India's atomic scientists and technologists are world class. They have developed nuclear energy capacities despite heavy odds. But there are handicaps which have adversely affected our atomic energy programme. We have inadequate production of uranium. The quality of our uranium resources is not comparable to those of other producers. Many countries have imposed sanctions on trade with India in nuclear materials, nuclear equipment and nuclear technology. As a result, our nuclear energy programme has suffered.

The nuclear agreement that we are negotiating with developed countries

will end India's nuclear isolation. It will open up new opportunities for trade in dual-use high technologies and nuclear materials and equipment, opening up new pathways to accelerate industrialization of our country. It will enable us to provide electricity to meet the needs of our farmers, our artisans, our traders and our industry.

Brothers and Sisters,

Four years ago I said to you that an important challenge we face is the challenge of providing good governance. We have taken several steps to make Government transparent, efficient and responsive. The Right to Information Act was one major step. We have initiated reform and modernization of Government. The National e-Governance Plan will make it easier for all our citizens to deal with the various agencies of Government.

We have completed the examination of the report of the Sixth Pay Commission. We have gone beyond the recommendations of the Commission in increasing emoluments of government employees. While doing this we have taken special care of the interests and welfare of our armed forces and para-military forces, and government employees working at lower levels in our civil services. This is one more step in making Government more efficient.

We need more reforms at all levels of Government. We want to improve our schools, our hospitals and other public services. The Panchayati Raj Institutions have an important role to play in decentralization and reform of Government. We must enhance their administrative and financial powers. I appeal to State Governments to take all possible steps for improving governance and to help in the Central Government's initiatives.

My dear Countrymen,



Terrorism, extremism, communalism and fundamentalism have emerged as major challenges to the unity and integrity of our country. The recent terrorist attacks in Bangalore, Ahmedabad, Jaipur and other parts of the country have shocked the nation. What words can I find to condemn such acts of barbarism. I share the sorrow and grief of people affected by terrorism. The Government of India will take concrete steps to rehabilitate and help such families.

I commend our security forces and intelligence agencies for the dedication with which they are dealing with the problem under difficult circumstances. But I agree that we have to further strengthen our intelligence agencies and police forces to deal with the problem of terrorism.

We will examine the functioning of our intelligence agencies and police and security forces and take all possible steps to equip them to tackle this challenge. Whatever resources are required, will be provided. Whatever manpower is required will be provided. We are firm in our resolve to meet the challenge of terrorism. I urge the State Governments, all political parties, civil society groups and social and religious leaders to cooperate with us in rooting out terrorism from our country.

Brothers and Sisters,

I am confident that we will overcome these challenges. But this requires hard work and unity of purpose. This requires a politics of consensus, not confrontation. This requires dialogue among communities, not discord. The challenge of communalism, of extremism and of terrorism cannot be won by a nation divided. The challenge of environmental and ecological destruction cannot be won by a society divided.

The challenge of economic modernization and social development of all, of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, of Other Backward Classes and Minorities, cannot be won by a people divided.

Brothers and Sisters,

I have said on a number of occasions that I am greatly concerned about the problem of regional imbalances in development. Some parts of our country are doing much better than others. Some States are being left behind. This pattern has persisted for far too long. We must ensure that the less developed States catch up with the developed ones.

We must pay special attention to the development of the North-Eastern region. Our Government has taken several initiatives to increase public investment in the North-East and in Jammu & Kashmir. We are investing in infrastructure and in education in these regions to encourage development and generate employment.

Jammu & Kashmir and the North-eastern region require an era of peace for them to catch up with the more developed parts of the country. We have been taking various initiatives to promote peace and stability in these States. These initiatives will be taken forward.

The recent incidents in the State of Jammu and Kashmir are a cause for concern. In this hour of crisis, divisive politics will lead us nowhere. I appeal to all political parties to keep the long term interests of Jammu and Kashmir in view and come together to find a permanent solution to the problems of the State.

The sacred shrine of Shri Amar Nath inspires all Indians to march together. This shrine is a shining example of our secular tradition, where Hindu pilgrims have been looked after for years by their Muslim brothers. Issues related to this sacred place, especially the issue of providing the best possible facilities to pilgrims, can only be resolved in an atmosphere of peace and goodwill. Dividing people in the name of religion can complicate these issues further which can also pose a threat to the unity and integrity

of the country. I appeal to the people of Jammu and Kashmir to cooperate with us in establishing peace in the State. It is my conviction that all issues can be resolved only through dialogue and peaceful means.

Brothers and Sisters,

Our ancient Himalayas are under environmental threat. If the Himalayan glaciers recede, the flow of water in our sacred rivers will go down. Climate change can disrupt our economy in several ways. Some of our coastal areas could be submerged. Our monsoon pattern may change. We need long term solutions to such threats. A national consensus is also required for the Government to evolve effective policies to deal with these problems.

Our Government has come forward with a National Action Plan on Climate Change. This plan shows how each of us must adapt our ways of working and living and how we must treat our natural resources, so that our carbon emissions remain within reasonable limits and our environment is protected.

My fellow countrymen,

Our goal in South Asia is to seek a peaceful, stable and prosperous neighbourhood. We seek to accelerate the pace of social and economic development in our country and our region, while safeguarding our national security. Our foreign policy has been based on these principles.

We wish all our neighbours well. We welcome the strengthening of democratic forces in our neighbourhood, especially in Bhutan, Nepal and Pakistan. The recent blasts in our Embassy in Kabul have cast a shadow over our efforts to normalize relations with Pakistan and to bring a lasting and honourable peace in our region. I have personally conveyed my concern and disappointment to the Government of Pakistan.

If this issue of terrorism is not addressed, all the good intentions that we have for our two peoples to live in peace and harmony will be negated. We will not be able to pursue the peace initiatives we want to take. The terrorists and those who support them are enemies of the people of India and Pakistan, of friendship between the two countries and of peace in the region and the world. We must defeat them.

In the last year we have strengthened our relations with the major powers, Latin American countries, Arab countries and African countries. We will continue our efforts in this direction, keeping in view our national interests.

India is today viewed with respect as one of the world's fastest growing economies. People of Indian Origin are engaged in diverse activities around the world and their capabilities are recognized the world over. Their achievements inspire us. The world today expects India to regain its due place in the comity of nations. This is a moment of opportunity for us.

We are rapidly marching forward to regain our rightful place in the comity of nations. But to reach that goal we have a lot of work to do at home. We have to overcome each of the challenges I have spoken about. We have to forge a greater unity of purpose between various political parties, between different communities, between all sections of our society, rich and poor.

We have to manage our natural and financial resources more prudently. We have an obligation to our future generations. We cannot think only for ourselves. We cannot think only about survival from day to day, from year to year and from one election to another. We have to think about the welfare and well-being of our children and grandchildren, their grandchildren and future generations.

If we resolve to work together as a nation, and work hard and with commitment to the welfare of all our people, there is nothing that we cannot do.

Let us resolve today to stand together, to strengthen the unity and integrity of our country and to stand firm in our determination to build a new India of our dreams.

My dear children, please join me in saying Jai Hind

Jai Hind

Jai Hind

Jai Hind