

My Dear Countrymen, Brothers and Sisters and Dear Children,

Today is once again a day of joy and happiness when we all gather to celebrate the anniversary of our Independence. On this sacred occasion, I greet you all.

Fifty eight years ago, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru had unfurled this glorious Tricolour for the first time from this historical place, thus fulfilling the centuries-old dream of crores of Indians to be independent from foreign rule.

Next year, we will commence the celebrations of the 150th anniversary of the First Battle of Independence. Through the celebrations, we will have a chance to once again remember the glorious freedom fighters of that great battle who had laid the foundations for our independence. In 1857, Bahadurshah Zafar had declared the Battle for Independence from this same historic Red Fort. The battle cry of Rani of Jhansi Lakshmi Bai, Peshwa Nana Saheb, Tantia Tope and Begum Hazrat Mahal of Lucknow was - "Delhi Chalo". This cry was renewed with vigour and force by Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose and in 1947 this ambition was fulfilled. Today, we have the opportunity of remembering their sacrifices. We can also learn from their enthusiasm and self-confidence, a number of traits which will be useful in facing today's challenges as well.

Today is a day when we feel proud of and celebrate our victory in the struggle for independence. This is a day of joy and happiness for all Indians, irrespective of where they reside in any part of the world. It is also a day on which we remember our valiant soldiers and security forces, thank them for their bravery and commitment, and hope that they will continue to be alert in the service of the nation.

Mahatma Gandhiji had also dreamt of the same independence when he launched the Dandi March 75 years ago. Through that struggle, he shook

the foundations of the greatest and most powerful empire the world had ever seen. Today, we need to once again remember the sacrifice and commitment of the Father of the Nation Mahatma Gandhi and also his dreams for an independent nation. We also need to reflect on how far we have been successful in fulfilling his dreams.

What was the dream Gandhiji had of an independent India? He had said, "I will work for an India where the poorest of the poor feel that this country and this nation belongs to them and that they have a major role in its construction. An India where there is no higher class or lower class among all people. An India where all communities live in friendship and harmony. An India where women have the same rights as men." He had also said, "the Swaraj I dream of is a Swaraj of poor people. I have not the slightest hesitation in saying that Swaraj cannot be complete till the poorest have a guarantee of being provided with the basic necessities of life".

Have we come anywhere near this dream? In the last one year, our attempt has been to build the India of Gandhiji's dream. The goal of our Government's National Common Minimum Programme is also the same. Last year on this very day, I had said from the Red Fort that I have no promises to make but only promises to keep. In order to fulfil the promises, we have taken many important steps and have taken major decisions which will contribute to our nation's progress. While taking these decisions, the focus of our thoughts and attention has always been the aam aadmi. The effort of our government has been that while we continue to make rapid economic progress, the benefits of this progress and growth must reach all sections of society in a fair manner. Our vision is not just of economic growth, but also of a growth which would improve the life of the aam aadmi.

Our country is witnessing unprecedented economic growth at this point in time. Last year, our economic growth rate was 7% and it is likely to be similar this year as well. Our country has never witnessed such consistently

high growth rates in the past. I am confident that if we maintain this momentum of growth for the next 5-10 years, then it would be possible for us to eradicate poverty, ignorance, hunger and disease from our country. This is not a dream but something that is possible in our times.

It is not only us but the entire world, which is viewing India as an emerging power of these times. The whole world is eagerly watching the manner in which India is making rapid economic progress. And this economic growth is happening within the framework of a liberal democracy. Our country is a multi-cultural, multi-religious, multi-lingual and multi-ethnic nation. Nowhere in the world do we have an example of a country of a 100 crore people seeking their economic and social destiny within the framework of a democracy. It is because of this that the entire world's attention is riveted on us. It is the result of our combined hard work that India today has made its mark on the world stage and we feel proud of our standing in the comity of nations.

Brothers and Sisters,

It is my belief that India's future is extremely bright and that this future is indeed, possible. In order to achieve this, we need to focus on achieving rapid economic growth and on ensuring social justice. It is only by walking on these two legs will we be able to ensure that the benefits of growth reach all sections of society.

Last year, while addressing the nation on this day, I had mentioned that our growth is critically dependent on seven sectors which I called the 'Saat Sutras'. These seven sectors were - agriculture, irrigation, education, health, employment, urban renewal and infrastructure. Today, we can review the progress made in these seven areas.

Our maximum emphasis has been on agriculture. Farmers are the backbone of our country and of our economy. It is the result of their tireless

efforts that we do not have any shortage of foodgrains in our country. The entire country is grateful to them for this.

We must admit that the economic growth we have been referring to earlier has not yet fully reached every individual in our society. This is particularly true in our rural areas. The growth in agriculture has not been at the required pace. Even today, over 60% of our population is dependent on agriculture and every farmer has a right to be a participant in our economic growth processes. Hence, we have talked about giving a 'new deal' to our farmers. We have taken a number of steps to alleviate the problems of our farmers, such as improving and enhancing the flow of agricultural credit, increasing investment opportunities and storage facilities, launching a National Horticulture Mission to increase the output and trade in fruits and vegetables, and promoting research and training in agriculture. It is our goal that by 2007, there should be a Krishi Vigyan Kendra in every district. Through this, the benefits of advanced research and training will reach all our rural brethren. Large parts of our country are still dependent on rainfall and we will focus on removing the problems of farmers in dry land areas. We are considering setting up a National Rainfed Area Authority for this purpose. It is our hope that in the coming years, agricultural growth becomes rapid and we have a new green revolution. We are fully committed to achieving this.

It is not possible for our rural areas to develop in the absence of basic infrastructural facilities. In order to improve basic infrastructure in rural areas, we have conceived an ambitious programme called 'Bharat Nirman'. In Bharat Nirman, one crore hectares of unirrigated land will be irrigated. All villages whose population is 1000 or more, and 500 or more in hilly areas, will be connected with roads. Two and a half crore houses will be given electricity connections, and through this, the entire country will be electrified. Over 60 lakh houses will be built in villages. The remaining 74,000 habitations which do not have access to safe drinking water will be provided these facilities. Each and every village will have at least one

telephone connection. I am confident that Bharat Nirman will ensure the rapid economic development of our rural areas.

In all our economic programmes, our policy has been to ensure the participation of the common man, particularly of those in rural areas. They should feel that all programmes belong to them. We have believed that the proper institutional mechanism to ensure their participation in the Panchayat system. Shri Rajiv Gandhiji had dreamt of Panchayati Raj many years ago. Today, zila, tehsil and village panchayats have a major responsibility to discharge. Our Constitution has placed the responsibility on panchayats, not only of ensuring economic development but also delivering social justice. Bharat Nirman provides a unique opportunity to our panchayats to shoulder this immense responsibility by effectively implementing this programme. I am confident that panchayats will ensure Bharat Nirman becomes a milestone in our development process.

We are giving importance not only to our rural areas but also to the economic conditions in our urban areas. Today, a third of our population lives in urban areas and keeping in mind the speed at which urbanization is taking place, the day is not far off when over 50% of India's population will be residing in urban areas. The foundations of our culture and society were laid thousands of years ago in the cities on the banks of Indus River. We taught the world the basic concepts of urban planning. However, today our cities are often unable to meet the basic needs of their residents on many counts. We will be investing in urban areas and for this, a National Urban Renewal Mission has been launched.

We have a large proportion of young people in our population. We will need to invest in their education and health so that their future prospects are bright. By doing so, our population will become our biggest asset.

It is necessary for every section of society to be literate and educated so that they can take advantage of our growth processes. By strengthening

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, we are trying to ensure universalisation of primary education. We are giving special emphasis to the education of the girl child. We need to make education joyful, interesting and meaningful so that children develop a desire to go to school. We need to pay particular attention to the education of first generation learners. We are resolute in our commitment to see that no child is deprived of the benefit of primary education. It is our hope that in the near future, women are as literate as men. In order to achieve these goals, resources shall not be a constraint. We are also committed to providing education to disabled children as well.

Along with primary education, we also need to pay attention to higher education. If India is seen around the world as a rising knowledge power, it is because of our Universities and Research Institutions. If we want to maintain our rapid economic growth, we need to improve the quality of these institutions and also create many more such institutions. Let us resolve to achieve excellence in academic work in the 150th anniversary year of the Universities of Kolkata, Mumbai and Chennai.

However educated an individual may be, it is necessary for the person to be healthy in order to lead a happy life. Through the National Rural Health Mission, we will provide the best primary health care facilities in each and every village. We are confident that by providing excellent primary health care, we will be able to improve the health of young mothers and children which will then lead to a consequent reduction in our population growth rate.

In the last fifty years, we have been able to control and eliminate many diseases which have been a scourge in our country. Leprosy has been eliminated in 25 states. Polio and T.B. are also being gradually brought under control. AIDS is now becoming a major national problem and we need to tackle this on a war-footing. We need to have a mass movement to ensure that this disease is rapidly checked and its growth arrested. We will also ensure that medicines are available to common people at reasonable

prices.

As I had mentioned earlier, the true test of development is the number of people who have secured employment and the number of families who have prospered as a result. As long as there is widespread unemployment in the country, we cannot claim that we are truly independent. It is with this goal in mind that Smt. Indira Gandhi had given the nation the goal of 'Garibi Hatao'. Today, if we need to remove poverty, we need to create employment "Rozgar Badhao". In order to ensure that a minimum level of employment is available to everyone in rural areas, it is necessary to have an employment guarantee. The National Rural Employment Guarantee Bill has been prepared with this goal in mind. We hope that this Act will bring about a revolutionary change in the lives of people in rural India. We are also revamping the Khadi and Village Industries Commission so that more employment is generated through small and village industries.

In order to ensure that our economic growth does not slow down, it is necessary to have strong infrastructure. Economic growth is intrinsically linked to the availability of infrastructure. Railways, roads and electricity are important elements of infrastructure. In order to improve our railways, a rail modernization programme has been prepared so that our railways become one of the best in the world. A dedicated freight corridor is being developed between Delhi-Kolkata and Delhi-Mumbai by investing over Rs. 25,000 crore rupees.

The development of our national highways is progressing at a rapid pace. We have begun work on an additional 30,000 km of highways and we will soon be six-laning the Golden Quadrilateral. There has been tremendous progress in civil aviation. World class airports are being constructed in many cities. Ports are being modernized and many new ports are under construction.

Shortage of electricity is still a major inconvenience. Electricity is an

essential ingredient of economic development. We need to ensure that electricity generation grows rapidly and that power shortages are eliminated. We need far greater investment in this sector. I have often said that, excepting for the poorest sections of society, giving electricity free of cost to other sections will worsen the financial condition of our electric utilities. We need to get used to paying a reasonable price for electricity just as we do for petroleum products. Through this, we can ensure supply of electricity in the right quantity, at the right time and of right quality. In my visit to the United States, we have managed to reduce some of the constraints which have been hampering the growth of our nuclear energy programme and in the next 10 years, in addition to the 1,50,000 MW of capacity being added in the thermal and hydro sectors, another 40,000 MW could be generated through nuclear energy.

While rapid economic growth is one facet of our vision for the nation, social justice and equitable development is the other facet. Last year, our greatest contribution to the nation has been to bring it back on the path of rapid economic growth. There is a ray of hope in the lives of all weaker sections of society. There is an atmosphere of calm, peace and communal harmony all around the country. We believe that this is an important achievement.

In our country, scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, backward classes and women suffer from many disabilities. Many of them have been discriminated against for centuries. It is essential that they are made stakeholders and participants in our development processes. We are committed to paying attention to their education, health and basic necessities. We have taken some steps to improve their economic and social status. A Bill has been introduced in Parliament on reservation in government employment. It will be our effort now to increase the opportunities for employment and equal opportunities in employment outside Government.

Our Adivasi brothers have been cultivating land near forests for many



generations. However, they do not have any rights on this land owing to which they live in constant fear of eviction. Their rights were snatched away from them 150 years ago during British rule. In order to correct this, we are bringing a legislation which will benefit scheduled tribes living in forests while at the same time ensuring conservation of our natural heritage.

Our Constitution provides for equality of all religions. All religions are safe and secure within our Republic. It is essential that minorities should have every opportunity of carrying on their daily activities with a feeling of security and happiness. This is also our goal. Hence we have repealed POTA. As a result, many sections of society are able to breathe easy. We have commissioned a report on the social economic status of minorities. This is being done for the first time and will be the basis for all our policy interventions for improving their status. We will also revive and revamp the 15 Point Programme for Minorities. The New 15 Point Programme will have definite goals which are to be achieved in a specific time frame.

We are going to start a special development programme which will focus on the skill enhancement of artisans and weavers, many of whom are minorities. This will help improve their incomes.

Industrial growth is the result of the sweat and toil of our working classes. This year, our industrial growth in May has exceeded 10%. I would like to congratulate all our workers for this magnificent result. The Government will pay specific attention towards addressing the problems of workers, particularly those in the unorganized sector. It is our hope that we will be able to provide a social security net for them so that they do not feel insecure in times of distress. However, I would like to emphasize that workers too have a responsibility. Wherever they may be working, in factories or in firms, they should work in cooperation with the management so that profitability of enterprises increases and they also benefit from this.

Women are the backbone not only of our homes but also of our nation. We

need to strengthen their hands and empower them fully. We have brought legislation to prevent domestic violence against women and to secure their property rights. We will also ensure reservation for women in Parliament and Legislative Assemblies.

In order to provide an opportunity for our youth and sportspersons to demonstrate their skills, we will make all possible efforts to ensure that India once again hosts the Asian Games in Delhi, the first since 1982.

In this new phase of development, we are acutely aware that all regions of the country should develop at the same pace. It is unacceptable for us to see any region of the country left behind other regions in this quest for development. In every scheme of the Government, we will be making all efforts to ensure that backward regions are adequately taken care of. This has been ensured in the Food for Work Programme and the National Rural Health Mission. We will also focus on the development of our border areas. We will ensure that these regions are provided basic infrastructure such as roads, electricity and telephone connectivity in the next 3 - 4 years.

Our rivers are the lifelines of the country. They are the foundations of our ancient civilization. Today the demand for water is growing all around. In the 21st century, water will be the most precious commodity and its shortage will be felt all around. We need to launch a national movement to prevent the wastage of water and for its efficient use. This is an absolute necessity. It is also necessary that all states of our country work together in a spirit of give and take and a spirit of mutual understanding to sort out all contentious issues amicably so that everyone is benefited.

We also need to pay special attention to our environment. We need to start a national campaign for cleanliness - so that our cities, towns, villages, roads, streets and homes are neat and clean. Gandhiji used to emphasise this aspect in his Ashram as well. We need to stop the pollution of our rivers and atmosphere. We need to protect our forests and natural heritage.

We must remember that we are only the custodians of our environment and it is our responsibility to preserve and pass it on to our future generations.

In the recent past, natural calamities have affected many parts of our country with disastrous effects on people and property. A tsunami in December, snowfall in January and floods in July. Lot of people have lost their precious lives in these calamities. The entire nation's sympathies are with the bereaved families. I am confident that we will face the problems of floods in a united manner, just we faced the devastation caused by the tsunami. Last month, Mumbai suffered immense damage and lost many lives because of unprecedented floods. In these difficult circumstances, the citizens of Mumbai have shown courage fortitude and patience in dealing with the enormous problems and have demonstrated the qualities which make Mumbai different from other cities. I would like to assure that we will provide whatever assistance is required to ensure that Mumbai, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Karnataka are restored to normalcy. In order to effectively tackle such natural calamities, we have constituted a National Disaster Management Authority. Through this, and by using the latest technologies, we hope to face future calamities in a much better manner.

In the country, we still have regions such as Jammu & Kashmir and the North-East where complete peace and tranquility does not exist. The people in these regions are the victims of violence and terrorism. Wherever conditions deteriorate we take the assistance of our Armed Forces. Wherever we have taken their assistance, they have shown patience and perseverance. Many of them have lost their lives. In order to ensure that the children of soldiers who have laid down their lives in the service of the nation get good education, we are starting a Prime Minister's Scholarship Scheme. Each year, 5000 children would be provided scholarships for college education.

However, accidents do happen once in a while. Keeping this in mind and with a view to protecting human rights, the Government had set up a

Committee to look into the provisions of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act. The Report of this Committee is being examined in detail and we will take all necessary steps so that there are no violations of human rights under this Act.

As a result of our policy in Jammu & Kashmir, the State is once again on the path of peace and progress. It is our humanitarian obligation that we assist the State in all possible ways so that the people there can live in peace and harmony. Terrorists have never been the friends of the people of Kashmir. As long as they continue their terrorist attacks, our Armed Forces will be alert and give them a fitting response. In this conflict, common citizens may also be affected at times. I have said before and I am repeating once again, that there is no issue that cannot be resolved through a process of discussion and dialogue. Our doors are always open and will continue to be open for anyone interested in dialogue. I invite everyone to join us to discuss the problems of the state of Jammu & Kashmir so that its people can lead a life of peace and dignity. If violence continues, then our response too will be hard. I am aware that the Government of Pakistan has put some checks on the activities of terrorists from its soil. However, it is not possible to achieve success through half-hearted efforts. It is necessary that the entire infrastructure of terrorism is totally dismantled.

In the context of terrorism and extremism, development and security have an intrinsic relationship. We have managed to face extremism successfully through a democratic process. However, it is imperative that a democratic government should be able to differentiate between the genuine problems of people and the designs of terrorists. Today, there are a number of challenges in our security environment such as terrorism, communal violence, atrocities on women and exploitation of dalits and adivasis. Our security forces have been facing the daunting task of controlling extremist violence admirably. Extremism is a challenge which requires a united response from all of us. However, it is also necessary to look at a political

resolution of this problem. Often extremism has its roots in backwardness and lack of economic development. It is not easy to handle problem of extremism in violation. However, by addressing it in all its dimensions - social, political, economic and security - in an integrated manner, I am confident that we will be successful in checking it.

India has always been a country which loves peace. Its destiny is intrinsically linked to those of its neighbours. Our goal has always been the prosperity and happiness of our citizens. Hence, we have always sought the friendship of our neighbours, although at times, this has not been fully successful. There seems to be some success in our search for peace and harmony now. Many problems of South Asia are similar, of which poverty and illiteracy are the most widespread. It is possible for us to eliminate these in the region by working together.

The composite dialogue process with Pakistan is continuing. As a result, we have been able to reopen the Srinagar-Muzaffarabad highway which was a long pending demand of the people and restarted the bus service on this route, a step which has been widely welcomed. Talks are going on to open similar links from points in other states.

Discussions are also going on a gas pipeline from Iran to India via Pakistan. Once this is completed, we will be able to address a major constraint affecting our economy.

It is our sincere hope that we work with all our neighbours in South Asia to effectively address the challenges of poverty, unemployment and disease. If India and Pakistan are able to work together, than we will have many opportunities for making our countries prosperous. I am confident that we will be able to fulfill this vision.

We have had historic links and relations with Afghanistan. It is our desire to see Afghanistan prosperous and strong. In a few days, I will be going to

Afghanistan. We will try to strengthen and support democracy and economic growth in all possible ways.

Our largest neighbour is China with whom we have a centuries-old relationship, a relationship from which both of us have learnt a lot and imbibed a lot. We are today willing and ready to deepen our trade and cultural relations with China for the benefit of the two nations. The agreement arrived at between our two countries in April has paved the way for a closer relationship.

I greet the people of Sri Lanka, Mauritius, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives and Myanmar and assure them with utmost sincerity that India is willing to work together with them for promoting development, prosperity and peace in the region.

My visit to the United States has been a major step in promoting friendship with that country. By deepening our economic and technological relations, we will be accelerating our own growth. Simultaneously, our two democracies can work together to strengthen democracy in the world. Russia is an old friend who has helped us in difficult times. We will deepen our friendly relations with Russia.

We also wish to deepen our relations with the countries to the East. The recently concluded trade agreement with Singapore is a major step in improving our economic engagement with the region. We will be entering into many more such agreements in future.

At this point, I would like to emphasize that the contribution of Indians and persons of Indian origin settled abroad in ensuring that our efforts are successful is enormous. They have not only traveled to far off lands to achieve their dreams of prosperity for themselves and their children, but have also played a stellar role in changing the world's perception of India. The world today sees India as a major knowledge power whose people are

skilled, competent, hard working and peace loving. Even within our own country, our scientists, doctors, engineers and scholars have contributed substantially in the achievements of our nation. We are proud of all of them.

To conclude, I would like to say that the biggest challenge in running a Government is to ensure that development programmes are implemented in an effective manner. We will ensure that our outlays of expenditure are visible to citizens as outcomes of progress. The Central Government, State Governments and Panchayats have to work together so that the expectations of people are fulfilled. If we have to achieve results, there is a need to change the manner in which governments function. There is no space in our government or in our society for corruption and arbitrary action. We are not prepared to tolerate this at any cost. Government servants must work with a sense of public service and they should be held accountable to the people. Governments will have to be made more transparent and accountable. The recently passed Right to Information Act is a landmark step in this direction.

India is on the road to progress. The whole world is watching us with expectation. It is possible for us to eradicate poverty, ignorance and disease within our lifetime. This has been made possible by the advances in science and technology.

There comes a time in the history of a nation when it can be said that the time has come to make history. We are today at the threshold of such an era. The world wants us to do well and take our rightful place on the world stage. There are no external constraints on our development. If there are any hurdles, they are internal.

We must seize this moment and grab this opportunity. We need to have the resolve to make our country prosperous. We must have the self confidence to realise that we are second to none, that Indians are as good as the best. Our political system and leadership must show sagacity, wisdom and

foresight so that we are able to make the best of this moment and make India a truly great nation.

Let us come together, as one nation, strengthened by our plurality, to work shoulder to shoulder and build a new India. An India where there are no barriers between the government and the people. An India where each and every Indian can stand proudly and proclaim that he is an Indian. Let us work together to build such a nation.

Dear children, join me and say "Jai Hind", "Jai Hind", "Jai Hind".