

My dear countrymen, brothers, sisters and dear children,

I greet you all on this anniversary of our Independence.

“The leaders of our freedom movement, under the stewardship of Mahatma Gandhi, had dreamt of an independent and prosperous India. On this day in 1947, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru took the first step towards the realization of that dream by hoisting the Tricolour at the Red Fort. The journey we began on 15 August, 1947 is now 65 years old. We have achieved much in these 65 years.

Today is certainly a day to celebrate the success of our democracy. However, on this occasion we should also introspect about what remains to be done. We would achieve independence in the true sense only when we are able to banish poverty, illiteracy, hunger and backwardness from our country. This would be possible only when we learn from our failures and build on our successes.

You are aware that these days the global economy is passing through a difficult phase. The pace of economic growth has come down in all countries of the world. Seen together, the European countries are estimated to grow at 0 percent this year. Our country has also been affected by these adverse external conditions. Also, there have been domestic developments which are hindering our economic growth. Last year our GDP grew by 6.5 percent. This year we hope to do a little better.

We cannot do much about the conditions that prevail outside our country. But we must make every effort to resolve the problems inside our country so that our economic growth and the creation of employment opportunities in the country are again speeded up.

While doing this, we must also control inflation. This would pose some difficulty because of a bad monsoon this year. However, we have taken

many measures to deal with the situation. In districts where there has been a deficit of 50 percent or more in the rainfall, diesel subsidy is being provided to farmers by the Government. Seed subsidy has been enhanced. Funds available under the Central scheme for fodder have been increased. Our effort is to ensure that people do not face difficulty due to shortage of seeds, fodder or water in any part of the country. It is good that we have a big stock of foodgrains because of the hard work of our farmer brothers and sisters, and availability of foodgrains is not a problem for us.

As far as creating an environment within the country for rapid economic growth is concerned, I believe that we are not being able to achieve this because of a lack of political consensus on many issues. Time has now come to view the issues which affect our development processes as matters of national security.

If we do not increase the pace of the country's economic growth, take steps to encourage new investment in the economy, improve the management of Government finances and work for the livelihood security of the common man and energy security of the country, then it most certainly affects our national security.

I promise to you today that our Government will work hard for India's rapid economic growth and for shielding the country from the effects of the global economic slowdown. I promise that we will work hard for creation of new employment opportunities for our young men and women living in villages and cities. We will make every possible effort to secure the livelihood of our poor brothers and sister, our workers and our farmers. We will leave no stone unturned to encourage investment in our country so that our entrepreneurs can make a substantial contribution to our economy.

I believe that this period of difficulties will not last long. Even as we face these problems, we should be encouraged by the fact that we have achieved extraordinary successes in many areas in the last 8 years. We

now need to replicate these successes in newer areas.

It has been our endeavour in the last 8 years to empower our citizens socially and economically so that they can contribute to the sacred task of nation building. Today, one out of every 5 households in the country has become eligible to benefit from the Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Act through a job card. In only the last one year we have provided employment to more than 8 crore people under this scheme.

When the UPA Government came to power in 2004, we had promised that we would provide electricity to all villages. To fulfill this promise, we launched the Rajiv Gandhi Rural Electrification Scheme. More than 1 lakh new villages have been provided with electricity connections under this scheme and now almost all the villages in the country have been electrified. Our next target is to provide electricity to each and every household in our country in the next 5 years and to also improve the supply of electricity.

No praise is high enough for our hard working farmers. They have produced a record output of crops successively in the last 2 years. Because of our Government's efforts for development of agriculture and for protecting the interests of farmers, agriculture has grown at an average rate of 3.3 per cent in the 11th Plan which is substantially higher than the 2.4 per cent we achieved in the 10th Plan. In the last 8 years, we have doubled the support prices of crops. We are providing loans at low interest rates to lakhs of farmers.

Our children are the biggest strength of our country. If our children are provided with good education and are healthy, then our future would be bright.

This is the reason why we have paid special attention to the needs of children in our policies and programmes. The education of children has been made mandatory by law. In the year 2006-07, only 93 per cent of

children in the age group 6-14 years were getting admission in schools. Today almost all children in this age group are being admitted to schools. More than 51,000 new schools have been opened in the country and about 7 lakh teachers appointed in them in just the last 2 years. Now we will focus on improving the quality of education. In the next few months we will put in place a system of continuous assessment of the benefit our children are getting from teaching. Participation of the community and parents would be ensured so that they can be satisfied with the quality of teaching.

The Mid-day-meal Scheme provides nutritious meals in schools for about 12 crore children everyday. This is the biggest scheme of its kind in the world.

In the last one and half years no new case of polio has come to light and now India does not figure in the list of countries affected by this disease.

Malnutrition in children is a big challenge for us. We have taken steps in many dimensions to deal with this problem. In the last 8 years, the number of mothers and children benefitting from the ICDS has doubled. The process of making the ICDS more effective is in its last stages and will be completed in the next 1 or 2 months.

We had launched the National Rural Health Mission in 2005 so that health services can be extended to each village in the country. Today this Mission is being implemented with the help of 10 lakh health personnel including 8.5 lakh Asha workers. After the success of the National Rural health Mission, we now want to expand the scope of health services in our towns also. The National Rural Health Mission will be converted into a National Health Mission which would cover all villages and towns in the country. We are also formulating a scheme for distribution of free medicines through Government hospitals and health centres.

We want to create many new job opportunities for our youth in the coming

years. To achieve this it is necessary that we train them in skills which our economy needs. It is our endeavour to put in place a system in which training facilities are available in many new skills. We also wish to provide short duration training courses of 6 weeks to 6 months for our young brothers and sisters. The National Skill Development Council has formulated a major scheme for skill development in which 8 crore people will be trained in the next 5 years. This is an ambitious scheme which can be implemented only through a specialized agency of the Central Government. Therefore, we are considering the establishment of a National Skill Development Authority so that skill development programmes all over the country can be implemented in a coordinated manner. We would also need contribution from the private sector and non-Governmental organizations in this work.

Creation of new employment opportunities is possible only when we encourage industry and trade. For this we need to speedily improve our infrastructure. Recently we have taken new measures to accelerate infrastructure development. Ambitious targets have been fixed in roads, airports, railways, electricity generation and coal production. The Government will take steps to increase investment for infrastructure development with the help of the private sector. To attract foreign capital, we will have to create confidence at the international level that there are no barriers to investment in India.

Just 10 years back only 3 out of every 10 households in our villages were benefitting from banking services. Today more than half of the rural households get the benefit of bank accounts. It will be our endeavour to ensure that all households benefit from bank accounts in the next 2 years.

We want to create a system in which money from Government schemes - pension for old people, scholarship for students and wages for labourers - can be credited directly into people's bank accounts. This would reduce inconvenience to the beneficiaries, make it easy for them to receive

payment and increase transparency. For this work, we will take help from the Aadhar scheme under which about 20 crore people have been registered so far.

To provide housing for our poor brothers and sisters residing in urban areas of our country we will soon launch the Rajiv Housing Loan Scheme. Under this scheme, people belonging to the economically weaker sections would be given relief on interest for housing loans of less than Rs. 5 lakh.

This year we will present the Twelfth Five Year Plan for consideration of the National Development Council. The Plan would determine the future course of action on all important matters relating to the country's development. It would lay down measures for increasing our present rate of economic growth from 6.5 to 9 per cent in the last year of the Plan. The Plan would focus special attention on areas important from the point of view of reaching the fruits of development to each citizen of our country and specially to the weaker sections of our society. I have full confidence that the Centre and the States will act together to implement the Twelfth Plan in an effective manner.

The incidents of violence which occurred in Assam recently are very unfortunate. I know that these incidents have resulted in the disruption of the lives of a large number of people. We fully sympathize with those families which have been affected by the violence. We are doing everything possible to provide relief to them. I also promise to you that our Government will make every effort to understand the reasons behind the violence and work hard with the State Governments to ensure that such incidents are not repeated in any part of the country.

We have achieved success in many areas of internal security. In Jammu and Kashmir, people participated in large numbers in the Panchayat elections. There has been a reduction in violence in the North Eastern States and we are engaged in dialogue with many groups there so that

they can join the mainstream of development. We have initiated new schemes of development in areas affected by naxal violence to ensure that the grievances of the people residing there, especially our brothers and sisters belonging to Scheduled Tribes, can be removed and their lot can be improved. However, we need to be constantly vigilant as far as internal security is concerned. Communal harmony has to be maintained at all costs. Naxalism is still a serious problem. The incidents which occurred in Pune in the beginning of this month point to the need for much more work to be done in the area of national security. We will continue to do this work with sincerity in the future also.

I would like to congratulate our scientists and technologists who have enhanced our prestige by successfully testing the Agni V Missile and launching the RISAT- I Satellite in space this year. Recently the Cabinet has approved the Mars Orbiter Mission. Under this Mission, our spaceship will go near Mars and collect important scientific information. This spaceship to Mars will be a huge step for us in the area of science and technology.

We have seen a lot of discussion in the recent months about the role of our armed forces and their preparedness. I would like to emphasise here that our armed forces and paramilitary forces have defended the security of our country both during war and peace with valour and honour. Our soldiers have made the biggest of sacrifices, whenever needed. Today I would like to reassure our countrymen that our armed forces and paramilitary forces are prepared to face any challenge. The Government will continue to work for modernizing these forces and providing them with the necessary technology and equipment. Today, I would like to thank our security forces, who are guarding our frontiers bravely, from the bottom of my heart. We will continue to make efforts for their welfare.

Our Government has set up a committee to examine issues relating to pay and pension of armed forces personnel. This committee will also look into

matters concerning pension of retired men and officers and family pension being paid to their families. We will take prompt action on the recommendations of the committee, once they are received.

Our Government has paid special attention to the welfare of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, minorities, women and other weaker sections. The special needs of our tribal and backward districts are being met through programmes such as the Integrated Action Plan, Backward Regions Grant Fund and Tribal Sub Plan. Through the Forest Rights Act, we have given proprietary rights to lakhs of our brothers and sisters belonging to Scheduled Tribes on land on which they have been living for generations. We are formulating a scheme to ensure that people belonging to Scheduled Tribes can get fair and remunerative prices for the forest produce they collect. The Government wants to speedily convert the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Bill into a legislation. Through this law we want to provide funds for the benefit of our tribal brothers and sisters in the mining areas.

We will make the 15 points programme for minorities more effective. The Multi-Sectoral Development Programme being implemented in districts with large minority populations will be expanded.

We have enhanced the amount of post-matric scholarship available to children belonging to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes and minorities. Our efforts to make these scholarship schemes more effective will continue. We are considering a new and effective law to put an end to the repulsive practice of manual scavenging and to provide opportunities to those engaged in this practice to begin their lives afresh.

Our commitment to make the work of the Government and administration transparent and accountable stands. On the last Independence Day, I promised you that we would take many steps for this purpose. I am happy

to state that during the last 1 year we have achieved good progress in this area. The Lok Sabha has cleared the Lokpal and Lokayukta Bill. We hope that all political parties will help us in passing this Bill in the Rajya Sabha. A number of other Bills have also been presented before the Parliament. The Cabinet has cleared a Public Procurement Bill. We will continue our efforts to bring more transparency and accountability in the work of public servants and to reduce corruption. But we will also take care that these measures do not result in a situation in which the morale of public functionaries taking decisions in public interest gets affected because of baseless allegations and unnecessary litigation.

In my first message to the country after assuming the office of Prime Minister I had appealed to you to contribute to the sacred work of nation building. I am very happy that today more of our citizens than ever before, and specially the youth, are taking interest in issues related to the progress of our society and country. Our Government believes that the difficult problems which India faces can be resolved only with the cooperation of the common man. It will be our endeavour that in the coming time, still more people help us in tasks like removal of poverty, illiteracy and inequality.

I believe that no power in the world can stop our country from achieving new heights of progress and development. What is needed is that we work together as one people for the success of our country. Let us once more resolve that we will continue to work for a progressive, modern and prosperous India.”

Dear children join me in saying

Jai Hind,
Jai Hind,
Jai Hind.