

Dear countrymen, brothers and sisters,

I consider myself fortunate to once again have the opportunity to address you on this sacred day of 15th August. On this auspicious occasion, I extend my hearty greetings to all of you.

Today is most certainly a day of happiness and pride for us. We are proud of our freedom. We are proud of our democracy. We are proud of our values and ideals. But we should also remember that it has taken the sacrifices of lakhs of Indians to bring us where we are today. Our well being and progress have been built upon the foundation of the hard work and sacrifices of our freedom fighters, the brave jawans of our armed forces, our farmers, our workers and our scientists.

Today, we remember all those martyrs who laid down their lives for the freedom and security of our country. The best way of paying homage to those brave sons of our country will be to resolve today that we will always stay committed to strengthening the unity and integrity of our nation. Let us all together take a vow that we will spare no effort to take India to greater heights.

The elections held a few months back have strengthened our nation and our democracy. In these elections, the people of India have favoured a politics that integrates our country and our society. You have chosen a political arrangement which is secular and which includes many varied strands of thought. You have voted for a democratic way of life which provides for resolution of differences through debate and discussion. I am of the view that we have received a mandate for starting a new era of cooperation and harmony in our national life.

We accept with humility the great responsibility you have entrusted to us. I wish to assure you on this sacred day that we will work with sincerity and dedication to fulfil the expectation of each and every citizen of India. It will

be our effort to ensure that every citizen of India is prosperous and secure and is able to lead a life of dignity and self respect. We will derive inspiration in our work from the ideals of service and sacrifice bequeathed to us by the father of our nation, Mahatma Gandhi. Our Government will follow the path shown by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Shrimati Indira Gandhi, Shri Rajiv Gandhi and other great leaders of our country. It will be our endeavour to carry everyone with us and to lead the country ahead on the path of development by creating an environment of consensus and cooperation.

We know that India's progress can be real only when every citizen of our country benefits from it. Every Indian has a right over our national resources. The policies and schemes of our Government in the last 5 years have been based on this paradigm. It has been our endeavour to ensure that the benefit of development reaches all sections of the society and all regions and citizens of the country. Our efforts have succeeded to some extent. But our work is still incomplete. We will carry it forward with firm determination and sincerity.

As you know, our economy grew at a rate of about 9% from the year 2004-05 to the year 2007-08. This growth rate came down to 6.7% in 2008-09 due to the global economic crisis. It is only a result of our policies that the global crisis has affected us to a lesser extent than many other countries. Restoring our growth rate to 9% is the greatest challenge we face. We will make every necessary effort to meet this challenge -- whether it is for increasing capital flows into the country, or for encouraging exports or for increasing public investment and expenditure. We expect that there will be an improvement in the situation by the end of this year, but till that time we will all have to bear with the fall out of the global economic slow down. I appeal to all businessmen and industrialists to join us in our effort to tackle this difficult situation and to fulfill their social obligations fully.

I have always believed that India's prosperity is not possible without the

prosperity of our farmers. This is the reason why our Government had waived bank loans of lakhs of farmers. We have increased the support prices for agricultural products by far more than ever before. This year there has been deficiency in the monsoons. This would definitely have some adverse impact on our crops. But, I am sure we will be able to meet the situation quite well. We will provide all possible assistance to our farmers to deal with the drought. In view of the deficiency in the monsoons, we have postponed the date for repayment of bank loans of our farmers. We are also giving additional support to farmers for payment of interest on short term crop loans.

We have adequate stocks of foodgrains. All efforts will be made to control the rising prices of foodgrains, pulses and other goods of daily use. I appeal to all State governments to exercise their statutory powers to prevent hoarding and black marketing of essential commodities.

We will have to adopt modern means to be successful in agriculture. We will have to make more efficient use of our scarce land and water resources. Our scientists must devise new techniques to increase the productivity of our small and marginal farmers. More attention will have to be paid to the needs of those farmers who do not have means for irrigation. The country needs another Green Revolution and we will try our best to make it possible. Our goal is 4% annual growth in agriculture and I am confident that we will be able to achieve this target in the next 5 years.

It is our ardent desire that not even a single citizen of India should ever go hungry. This is the reason why we have promised a food security law under which every family living below the poverty line will get a fixed amount of foodgrains every month at concessional rates. It is also our national resolve to root out malnutrition from our country. In this effort, special care will be taken of the needs of women and children. We will endeavour to extend the benefit of ICDS to every child below the age of six years in the country by March 2012.

The first UPA government had given the right to 100 days of employment in a year to every rural family through the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. In the last 4 years, this programme has been expanded to cover the whole country. The programme has been able to fulfil the expectations from it to a large extent. In the year 2008-09, it benefited about 4 crore families. It has also contributed to improvement in rural infrastructure. In the coming days we will improve the programme to bring more transparency and accountability into it. New types of works will be added to the works that can be taken up under the programme.

We know that good education is not only desirable in itself but is also essential for the empowerment of our people. We have recently enacted the Right to Education Act. This law provides to each child of our country the right to elementary education. I wish to make it clear that funds will not be a constraint as far as education is concerned. We will give special attention to the needs of disabled children. As a result of our efforts in the last few years, almost every child in our country has access to primary education today. Now we also need to pay greater attention to secondary education. Secondary education will be expanded through a programme that will ensure that every child in the country gets its benefit. We will endeavour to provide bank loans and scholarships to the maximum possible number of students to support their education.

A new scheme will be started to help students from economically weaker sections of society by way of reduced interest rate on their education loans. This will benefit about 5 lakh students in getting technical and professional education.

Good health is one of our basic needs. The National Rural Health Mission that we have started aims at strengthening the infrastructure for rural public health services. We will expand the Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana so as to cover each family below the poverty line. In our journey on the road of

development we will pay special attention to the needs of our differently abled brothers and sisters. We will increase facilities available for them.

While touching upon issues related to health, I would also like to make a mention of the flu that is spreading due to the H1N1 virus. As you all know, some parts of our country have been affected by this illness. The Central Government and the State Governments will together continue to make all necessary efforts to control the spread of this infection. I also want to assure you that the situation does not warrant a disruption of our daily lives because of fear and anxiety.

The special programmes that our government had started for the development of rural and urban areas will be accelerated. We have been successful to some extent in improving the infrastructure in rural areas through Bharat Nirman. But there is still a wide disparity between the development of rural and urban areas. To this end, the allocations under Bharat Nirman have been increased substantially this year. We will set more ambitious targets for schemes for house construction and telecommunications in rural areas.

We will accelerate our efforts to improve physical infrastructure in the country. The Road Transport and National Highways Department has initiated action for construction of 20 Km of National Highways every day. Similarly, Railways have started work on the Dedicated Freight Corridors. We are giving careful attention to the problems of Air India and will resolve them soon. The schemes of roads, railways and civil aviation being implemented in Jammu & Kashmir and the States of the North East will be especially monitored.

We had started the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission for the urban areas. We will accelerate this programme also. Today, lakhs of our citizens live in slums which lack basic amenities. We wish to make our country slum free as early as possible. In the next five years, we will

provide better housing facilities to slum dwellers through a new scheme, Rajiv Awas Yojana.

Climate change has become an issue of global concern in recent years. If we don't take the necessary steps in time, our glaciers will melt and our rivers will go dry. The problems of droughts and floods will grow in seriousness. We also need to prevent air pollution. India wishes to tackle the problem of climate change in partnership with other countries of the world. We have taken a decision to constitute 8 National Missions. We are committed to meet the challenge of climate change through these 8 Missions. To increase the use of solar energy and to make it affordable, we will launch the Jawaharlal Nehru National Solar Mission on 14th November of this year.

The sacred Ganga is the life source for crores of Indians. It is our duty to keep the river clean. We have constituted the National Ganga Authority in which the Central and State Governments will jointly work towards this end. The cooperation of the public is also needed in this effort.

Our natural resources are limited. We must use them more efficiently. We need a new culture of energy conservation. We also need to prevent the misuse of water. We will pay more attention to programmes for water collection and storage. "Save Water" should be one of our national slogans.

If we work united, we can meet all challenges that confront us. Our citizens have the right to express dissent and anger. I also maintain that every government should be sensitive to people's complaints and dissatisfaction. But nothing is achieved by destroying public property and indulging in violence against one's fellow citizens. Our democracy has no place for those who resort to violence to express their disagreement, and the government will deal firmly with such people.

Terrorism has emerged as a threat to peace and harmony in all parts of the

world. After the horrific terror attacks in Mumbai in last November, our government has taken many steps against terrorism. To root out terrorist activities, our security forces and intelligence agencies are being constantly upgraded. I am sure that with cooperation from all sections of our society, we will be successful in eliminating terrorism from our country.

Some parts of our country continue to be affected by the Naxalite menace. It is the constitutional obligation of the government to protect the life and liberty of our citizens. Those who think that they can seize power by recourse to the gun do not understand the strength of our democracy. The Central Government will redouble its efforts to deal with Naxalite activities. We will extend all help to the State Governments to make their police forces more effective. Central forces will be provided wherever they are needed. We will also do more to ensure better coordination among States.

I would also like to state here that we will endeavour to remove those causes of social and economic dissatisfaction which give rise to problems like Naxalism. We believe in a development process which will remove backwardness, unemployment and reduce disparities in income and wealth. We seek active partnership of our brothers and sisters of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in our development processes.

We do not subscribe to the view that to take special care of the deprived sections of the society amounts to appeasement. In fact, we believe that it is our solemn duty to do so. Our government will give its full attention to the well being of our brothers and sisters belonging to the minority communities. We have started many schemes for the welfare of the minorities. These programmes will be taken forward. The funds for the special schemes taken up for the development of minority concentration districts have been enhanced quite substantially this year. Similarly, we have allocated increased funds for scholarship schemes for minorities that the first UPA government had started. A Bill to prevent communal violence has been introduced in Parliament and efforts will be made to convert it into

a law as soon as possible.

The practice of female foeticide regrettably persists in our society. This is a shame for all of us. We must eliminate it as early as possible. Our progress will be incomplete till women become equal partners in all areas of our life and in our nation's progress. Our government is committed to the early passage of the Women's Reservation Bill. This legislation will provide one-third reservation for women in Parliament and the State Assemblies. We are also working on a legislation to provide 50% reservation for women in rural and urban local bodies. In fact, we should find ways and means to increase the participation of women in all democratic institutions. Our government will make sustained efforts for social and economic empowerment of women. We have decided to launch a National Female Literacy Mission, through which female illiteracy will be reduced by half in the next three years.

We are proud of our brave soldiers. It is our duty to ensure that ex-servicemen are able to lead a life of comfort. We have accepted the recommendations of the committee constituted to examine the issue of pension of ex-servicemen. This will lead to increased pension for about 12 lakh retired jawans and Junior Commissioned Officers.

In our journey of development, we should not only pay special attention to some sections of our society, but must also take care of the special needs of the backward regions of our country. We will redouble our efforts to remove regional imbalances in the level of development. Here I would like to make a special mention of our States of the North-East. Our government will constantly endeavour to make the States of the North East equal partners in the country's progress. Imphal or Kohima may be physically far away from Delhi, but the welfare of our brothers and sisters of the North East is always close to our heart. We know that without their well-being the country cannot move forward.



There have been two elections in Jammu & Kashmir since I addressed you on the last Independence Day. The first one was for the State Legislative Assembly and the second for the Lok Sabha. People of all areas of the State have participated vigorously in both the elections. This is a proof that there is no place for separatist thought in Jammu & Kashmir.

Our Government will continue assisting the State Government in improving governance in all parts of Jammu & Kashmir. It will be our endeavour to ensure that human rights are respected in the State and all its citizens are able to lead a life of peace and dignity in an environment of safety and security. We respect the special assurances and concessions provided to Jammu & Kashmir in our Constitution. We will continue to honour these special provisions.

Today's world is becoming smaller in many respects. Whether it is the international economic crisis or terrorism or climate change - what happens in one part of the world has an effect on other parts also. The international economic and political order is changing. Questions are being raised on the functioning and continued effectiveness of the multilateral institutions established in the 20th Century.

Our foreign policy should be able to cater to India's interests in these constantly changing circumstances. I am happy that we have been successful in doing this to a large extent.

We have good relations with the United States, Russia, China, Japan and Europe. There is a tremendous amount of goodwill for India and its people in the countries of South East Asia, Central Asia, West Asia and the Gulf. We have further strengthened our traditional ties with Africa. We are looking for new opportunities in Latin America.

As far our neighbours are concerned, we want to live with them in peace and harmony. We will make every possible effort to create an environment

conducive to the social and economic development of the whole of South Asia.

However good our programmes and schemes might be, their benefit will not reach the public till the government machinery is not free of corruption and till it is not effective in their implementation. I would like our public administration to be more efficient so that programmes for public good can be implemented faster. We need to improve our delivery systems to provide basic services to our citizens. We will act with speed on the recommendations of the Administrative Reforms Commission to strengthen governance. Renewed efforts will be made to decentralize public administration through the Panchayati Raj Institutions and to ensure greater involvement of people in it. Initiative will be taken for a new partnership between the civil society and the government so that taxpayers' money is better spent. We have enacted the Right to Information Act to enhance accountability and transparency in public life. This law will be improved so that it is more effective.

We have to make special efforts to strengthen the administrative machinery for our rural programmes. Those who live in villages and semi-urban areas should get services similar to the residents of urban areas. Communication and Information Technology can go a long way in achieving this objective. Recently, we have set up the Unique Identification Authority of India. This is a historic step to link up the whole country through a high quality administrative arrangement. We expect the first set of identity numbers to be available in the next one to one and a half years.

Today, as I stand before you I can feel the energy of more than 100 crore Indians marching ahead on the path of progress. Some people question whether India will ever be able to attain its true potential. I have no doubt about this. We are rapidly moving forward. We have faith in ourselves. We have political stability. Our democracy is an example for the whole world. We are gaining in economic strength. And most importantly, we have full

confidence in our youth. They are our future. I am sure that they will take our country to a new glory.

Let us all commit ourselves today to working for a golden future. On this sacred occasion let us resolve that nation building will be our highest duty.

Jai Hind

Jai Hind

Jai Hind.