

Dear countrymen,

My hearty greetings to all of you on the sacred occasion of our Independence Day.

Each year on this day, we gather at the Red Fort and unfurl our beloved Tricolor. The Tricolor is a symbol of our freedom, of our self-respect, and of sacrifices and martyrdom.

People belonging to the older generations would certainly remember the time when young boys and girls would form themselves into small groups, take the flag in their hands, and go around villages and city streets singing, Vijayi Vishwa Tiranga Pyara, Jhanda Uncha Rahe Hamara. (May our beloved and victorious Tricolor fly high in the world.)

Today we bow our heads in homage to the memory of all the leaders, fighters, and martyrs of our Freedom Struggle.

My greetings to all the jawans of the three Armed Forces and to the security personnel. We gratefully remember those brave soldiers who laid down their lives while guarding our frontiers or in the battle against terrorism.

This year the festival of freedom has arrived bringing the message of good rains in most parts of the country. We hope that the areas, which have not yet received adequate rainfall, would do so.

The last year went by in grappling with the crisis of drought. We assisted all the drought-hit areas to the fullest extent, sent adequate foodgrains there, and ensured that there was no hunger anywhere. We also took care of the mute cattle.

Felicitations to our farmers, who with their hard work, have filled the

granaries in the country.

Felicitations to our industrious workers, skilled managers, and far-sighted businessmen, whose successes have attracted the attention of the entire world. Today, India's economy has grown to be the fourth largest in the world.

Greetings to all scientists, teachers, litterateurs, artistes, and to dear children.

Felicitations to all the people of Indian origin living abroad. They have made a remarkable contribution to raising India's stature in the world. We are proud of them.

Today, we offer our salutations to Mother India, whose children we all are. Whatever be our religion, caste, region, or language, we all are one. This unity is our strength.

We should cherish the diversity that underpins this unity. But we must, under all circumstances and at any cost, keep our national unity and integrity intact. This is the most important message of Independence Day.

Sisters and brothers, this is the sixth consecutive time that I have been speaking to you from the ramparts of this historic Red Fort. This has been possible only because of your affection and support.

The dream of India as a great nation, which we had seen during the Freedom Struggle, continues to inspire us even today. To some extent, this dream has been realized. Yet, a lot more remains to be accomplished.

Despite all the hardships, and braving all the challenges in these fifty-six years, India is standing in the world with her head held high.

The nation's security is supreme to us. India cannot be dependent on others for her security. Therefore, the first act of my Government five years ago was to make India, for her self-defence, a nuclear weapons state.

The world is changing. New challenges are emerging before us. We have to make India stronger both economically and socially.

In the past five years, India's prestige in the world has gone up, thanks to our pro-active foreign policy. The international community's way of looking at us has undergone a big change. The world is now recognizing India:

As the world's largest democracy;

As an emerging global economic power;

As the confluence of a modern nation and an ancient civilization;

As a powerful country, dedicated to the ideal of peace.

Sisters and brothers, it is our policy to establish friendly and cooperative relations with all our neighbors. We believe in resolving all disputes peacefully. Our frequent initiatives to normalize relations with Pakistan are not a sign of our weakness; rather, they are an indication of our commitment to peace.

In recent months, there has been some progress in normalizing relations with Pakistan. Nevertheless, terrorist activities are still continuing. The test of our neighbour's sincerity lies in whether he is prepared to stop cross-border terrorism totally.

We hope that Pakistan abjures its anti-India outlook. The people of both countries wish to live in peace.

I have been telling our Pakistani friends that we have spent fifty years fighting. How much more blood is yet to be spilt? The two of us need to fight against poverty, against unemployment, and against backwardness.

We should increase trade and economic links between our two countries. When we share a two thousand kilometer long border, it makes no sense for us to trade via a third country.

Let people travel to and fro. Let more and more elected representatives visit each other's country. Let us expand bilateral cultural relations.

Let us open some new doors, new windows, and new light-holes in the walls that divide us.

The love that the two-year-old girl Noor from Lahore received in India carries a message, which our friends in Pakistan should understand.

On the occasion of Independence Day of both our countries, I invite Pakistan to walk together with India on the road to peace. This road is decidedly bumpy. There are even mines strewn along this path. Yet, once we start walking, we will find the hurdles getting out of our way.

I had gone to Srinagar a few months back. I'm going there again at the end of this month. The atmosphere there is changing.

Last year, from the ramparts of this very Red Fort, I had declared that elections in the State would be held on time, and that they would be free and fair. Not everybody believed in it then. But, we fulfilled our promise.

The free elections there have yet again demonstrated the fact that the people of Kashmir have rebuffed terrorism from across the border.

The people of Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh have faith in democracy. They want peace. They would like to see happiness return to their lives.

Those people who, while talking about Kashmir, advocate the right to self-determination, wish to divide India on communal lines for the second

time. They will not be allowed to succeed in this.

This year, more than one lakh tourists went to Kashmir. There was a large turnout of pilgrims going on the Amarnath yatra. Nearly six thousand students from different parts of India are today studying in Kashmir. Next week, we shall launch mobile telephone services in the State.

The knotty issues in Jammu and Kashmir can be unraveled only through dialogue. We shall take forward the efforts that have been initiated in this direction. People who have been uprooted have to be resettled in their homes.

Dear Countrymen, the progress that India has made in recent years has given me new hope and confidence.

An India, which was used to borrowing from abroad has started lending to others.

An India that was perennially troubled by a paucity of foreign exchange, has today accumulated nearly US \$ 100 billion of foreign exchange reserves.

The prices of essential commodities are under control. There is no shortage of anything in the market.

Poverty is declining. It is our resolve to eradicate it faster.

There are no waiting lists now for telephone or gas connections. The number of mobile phone users has gone up from 8 lakh to 1.5 crores. In the coming year, 1.5 crore more mobile customers will be added.

We are all aware of the poor condition of our roads. Even fifty years after Independence, there were nearly two lakh villages, which were unconnected by proper roads. For the first time, the Centre has started the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana to connect them with good roads.

In the first five decades of Independence, only 550 kilometers of four-lane

highways were built. In other words, only 11 kilometers a year. Now, we will build 24,000 kilometers of highways at the rate of 11 kilometers a day.

The Rs. 54,000-crore National Highways Development Project is progressing rapidly. Three lakh people are working on it everyday. Next year, this number will go up to six lakh per day.

Lakhs of young Indians have got attractive employment in the field of computers. Sitting in our cities, they are providing services to hospitals, factories, and offices in various countries. Software exports have zoomed from Rs. 8,000 crore to nearly Rs. 50,000 crore.

Our country is now ready to fly high in the field of science. I am pleased to announce that India will send her own spacecraft to the moon by 2008. It is being named Chandrayaan I.

We have increased the amount of lending to agriculture and related sectors. Interest rates have been reduced. We shall soon constitute a National Kisan Commission to encourage new experiments in farming, promote investments in agriculture, and study the various problems faced by our farmers.

The Green Revolution and the White Revolution of previous decades have imparted much strength to Indian agriculture. Now India needs a new revolution: the Food Chain Revolution. Its aim is to achieve a doubling of the average income of the Indian farmer by 2010. An important part of this revolution is to reduce wastage of foodgrains, fruits and vegetables worth thousands of crores each year.

Based on the success of Kisan Credit Cards, we have decided to provide credit card facility to all eligible artisans, weavers, and fishermen. The rate of interest on loans given to them will be reduced to 9 percent a year. A contributory insurance scheme will also be started for their benefit.

Under the Antyodaya Anna Yojana, 1.5 crore poorest families in the country are being given 35 kilos of foodgrains each month at the rate of Rs. 2 a kilo of wheat and Rs. 3 a kilo of rice. Never before were foodgrains provided at such cheap prices. This is the largest food security program in the world.

With the launch of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, no child, especially the girl child, will be deprived of primary education. To implement this program effectively, 2.5 lakh new teachers will be appointed this year itself.

The Mid-Day Meal Scheme for children up to class five is going on in some States. Now, we have decided to run it throughout the country. Later, this will be extended to students up to class ten. This National Program will be known as ~Akshaypatra~. I appeal to voluntary organizations, religious establishments and women's self-help groups to come forward to implement this program in an effective way.

I know what people in under-developed States have to suffer due to the lack of good hospital services there. Therefore, under the Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana, six new hospitals with modern facilities, like those available at AIIMS in Delhi, will be established in backward States in the next three years.

Friends, for decades a debate was going on about a project to link our rivers, as a way of freeing India from the curse of floods and droughts. Now we have taken up this challenge. I am pleased to inform you that work on two river-linking projects, with the cooperation of State Governments, will be taken up before the end of this year. We will mobilize necessary resources for these projects.

Never before had housing construction taken place at the kind of speed witnessed in the past five years. Never before were housing loans available

at such low rates as now. Lakhs of people have got employment in the housing sector.

India has limitless potential in tourism. Take the case of this historic Red Fort itself. It has been taken up for comprehensive restoration for the very first time in its 350 years. I can see that a beautiful garden is coming up in the ground in front of me. It can be befittingly called the ~August 15 Park~.

I would like you too to emulate this example by undertaking such beautiful projects for the conservation of heritage in your own village or town.

The over-riding objective of our policy of economic reforms is just this: We want to create a dynamic economy that not only succeeds against global competition, but is also caring and compassionate towards the poor and the neglected.

We express our condolences for those who have become victims of untimely death in recent mishaps and natural calamities.

Sisters and brothers, the hands of young Indians are today scripting India's bright future. An ancient nation with a history of several thousand years has once again become a Young Nation and is all set to create a new history.

Today, in this nation of a 100 crore people, 60 crore are less than thirty years old. This generation is better educated than any generation in the past, and more ambitious than any generation in the past. It is a generation that has made up its mind not to fall behind anyone in the world in this age of competition.

Today, the doors of opportunity are opening up for our young people all over the world. These opportunities will only increase in the coming years and decades. Therefore, we should educate our youth in science, technology and other new disciplines from now itself.



I appeal to all, that we listen to the heartbeats of this Young India; that we understand the dreams of this Young India; that we encourage this Young India in every way possible; and, that we give proper guidance to this Young India.

Countrymen, today there is a paramount need that we maintain peace in our society and strengthen the bonds of brotherhood. Development requires peace, goodwill and mutual cooperation. Those who wish to divide the society on the basis of religion, caste or community are doing harm to the country.

India is a multi-religious nation. It is against both its nature and culture to practice discrimination or to do injustice to anybody on the grounds of faith. We should always care for the minorities and be attentive towards their welfare.

Peace talks in the North-Eastern States are yielding positive results. The hands that took up the gun now wish to participate in the development of their region. The Government is ready to welcome them.

Friends, it is our responsibility, the responsibility of the Government as well as of the society, that we provide equal opportunities to our brethren belonging to the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Backward Classes and make them partners in the system. To ensure that economic and social justice fully reaches them is not only our Constitutional duty but also our moral obligation.

We have removed the difficulties that had cropped up in the proper implementation of the policy on reservations. Untouchability in our society is on the decline. However, we have to completely remove this blot.

We have established a new ministry for the development of Adivasis. We

have also set up a separate Commission for them. For the first time in fifty years, the list of Scheduled Tribes has been revised and over a hundred new communities have been added to the list.

Friends, after the experience so far, I have come to the conclusion that there is an imperative need for greater commitment and accountability in our system of governance, which has the responsibility of implementing policies and decisions. There is delay in government offices even for getting the right work done. Delays breed corruption.

My Government is prepared to fight corruption at all levels. We have decided to enact the Lok Pal Bill, which had been pending for several decades. In spite of opposition from some people, I have personally brought the Prime Minister within the ambit of its investigation, so that you can even book your Prime Minister if he commits any wrong.

Stringent steps are being taken against economic offenders.

Sisters and brothers, the Government of the National Democratic Alliance has completed five years. All the previous experiments in running coalition Governments at the Centre had failed. We have succeeded.

Today there is a tremendous hunger for development among the people. They want such a stable government which is determined to improve their living conditions and also capable of doing so.

In our polity today, there is, on the one hand, a growing trend towards wanting to work together, but, on the other hand, there is also a scenario of disarray.

Our States have governments of different political parties. The Centre has established cooperative relations with them. Political discrimination on account of ideological differences is unacceptable to us.

The proposal to reserve 33% seats for women in Parliament and State Legislatures, as a means of women's empowerment, has now become a national resolve. Today, there are over 10 lakh women members in our panchayats and municipal bodies. I congratulate them for their good work.

However, it is regrettable that it has become difficult to pass the Bill for Women's Reservation in its original form because of a lack of consensus in Parliament.

Now a new proposal has been brought forward that seeks to create 33% double-member seats, in which one of them is reserved for women. This is a practical suggestion. All the supporters of women's reservation should consider it with a positive outlook. If there is any other suggestion on which a consensus is possible, the same should be implemented. There should be no further delay in realizing this goal, for which our sisters have been waiting for a long time.

Dear Countrymen, today the nation is at such a turning point from where it can take a big leap forward. The yearning to achieve the lofty vision of making India a Developed Nation by 2020 is gathering strength all over the country.

In just one generation, India can be liberated from the curse of poverty, unemployment and underdevelopment. This is not a daydream. It can be turned into reality. Many countries in the world have demonstrated it.

Look behind a little. India has marched forward by overcoming many a formidable crisis. Today, when the era of resurgence has arrived, why should there be any doubt in anyone's mind?

What is needed is only this:

That all of us move together.

That all of us move with discipline.

That we adopt a new work culture.

That we work with a long-term perspective.

When this ancient and great nation combines talent and hard work, and strives its utmost in pursuit of a common vision, it will certainly succeed in building a bright future for itself.

Nearly 40 years ago I had written a poem, from which I would like to present a few lines to you.

Together, we have to march

Obstacles will come, let them.

Dark clouds of apocalypse will gather, let them.

Even if embers smolder under our feet,

Or flames rain over our heads,

Smilingly, we shall light the fire

With our own hands, and burn,

But together, we have to march.

In laughter or in grief, in hurricanes,

In immortal sacrifices beyond count,

In greens or in ruins,

In insults or in accolades,

In pain, too,

We have to thrive

Heads held high, hearts swelled with pride.

Together, we have to march.

Thank you.

Sisters, brothers and dear children, join me in saluting:

Jai Hind! Jai Hind! Jai Hind!