

Brothers and sisters and dear countrymen, my greetings to all of you on the Independence Day. I will attempt to speak to you in Hindi. I remember as a student being inspired by the address of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru from this historic Red Fort on this very day. He described himself as the first servant of the Indian people. I stand before you as a humble servant of the nation.

I come from a small farmer's family. I never imagined that I would address the nation as Prime Minister from Red Fort. It is a tribute to our Constitution and democratic process that this opportunity has been given to me - a farmer's son.

Mahatma Gandhi's call for freedom struggle evoke warm response from the people in our country belonging to regions, identities and persuasions. He won independence for us. On this day we pay homage to all the leaders and of our freedom movement.

We must remember the sacrifice of the Father of Nation. The way Gandhiji led the freedom movement, it brought oneness to the nation. The beauty of this unity is that it is not only geographical or historical, it is based upon the conviction that this nation belongs to all its people and its plural and secular character.

Century after century the word "Bharat" has evinced this oneness and Indian identity in every language in the country and in the heart of every Indian. A Sanskrit composition, which is known throughout the country reads -- *Tham varsham Bharatam, Bharatiya Yatra Santati* -- Those who dwell within this great land, whatever be their creed or colour, whatever may be their religion, all belong to this country. They are all Indians.

This is our heritage, this is our history, and this is our civilization.

Whenever we surrendered this oneness - which is based on the principles of pluralism and secularism - and resorted to fanaticism, our country suffered and declined. The greatest need now, as in the past, is to foster tolerance and goodwill among all our countrymen.

We have formulated a Common Minimum Programme to run our

government.

In this programme, we have resolved that we will take important steps for the prosperity of our country and improvement of the living standards of the people.

I come from rural India where most of our brothers and sisters live. I have seen poverty and deprivation from close quarters. I know the problems of the common man. I deem it a privilege and duty to launch this new agenda.

Our Government has resolved that we will make special efforts to improve the quality of life of our rural people.

Our government is truly in consonance with the glorious Indian tradition and heritage. Our democracy is mature enough to provide a stable and strong Government within the federal culture and polity.

The Government is based on federalism, decentralisation and social justice and we will ensure the dignity of both the nation and every citizen.

It is the duty of every citizen of India to update and protect the sovereignty, unity and integrity of India. It is the duty of each one of us to preserve the rich heritage of our composite culture.

The Government will take all steps to ensure that harmonious relations are maintained between different communities and groups.

We are committed to protecting the lives and property of all the people, particularly the weaker sections and the minorities.

I visited Punjab recently and was impressed by the determination with which it had fought terrorism and kept the wheels of progress moving. I congratulate the brave and enlightened people of Punjab on this achievement.

I am deeply disturbed by a few recent incident ethnic violence and avoidable conflicts between different sections of society, in which some of our brethren and sisters - even children lost their lives. My heart goes out to their families. We shall provide them with all support and sustenance

bearing with their tragic loss.

Violence manifesting itself in separating extremist, criminal and anti-social activities has no place in our society. It will be firmly dealt with by the Government.

Jammu & Kashmir is an integral, part of India and will remain so forever. The people of Jammu & Kashmir are our own people, they are Indians. This situation prevails from centuries.

You are aware, the problems in Kashmir are entirely those created by external forces.

There should be no doubt in any quarter about our resolve to preserve the territorial integrity of India.

I visited Jammu and Kashmir twice and met the people of the State, and felt their aspirations. The conditions are changing there. The holding of elections to Parliament in Jammu & Kashmir is a triumph of our democratic values. The people of Jammu & Kashmir have demonstrated their maturity and wisdom by rejecting militancy abetted from across the border.

Building on these positive developments and mood of the people, we are holding the assembly elections in the State next month.

We will complete the task of restoration of normalcy and return of a popular Government in Jammu & Kashmir.

The North-Eastern region of India requires special attention and support in the containment of violence, ethnic strife and insurgency.

Efforts will be made for the well-being of the people of the area and redressal of their grievances.

Firm steps will be taken to check the inflow of foreign migrants and arms together with effective administration.

In our view, providing clean and efficient administration is the need of the hour and all of us should be committed to this goal.

Probity and accountability have to be the key norms in public life and governance.

The primary task is to reduce as much as possible the scope for arbitrary and discretionary decision making.

Our procedures should be made simpler and more transparent.

We have begun taking steps to fulfill our commitments to provide a corruption free and clean administration.

Our mechanisms and agencies for combating corruption have to be strengthened and made more effective.

Corruption, especially in high places is rightly a matter of widespread concern among the people. We must build and strengthen the institutions that would deter corruption and restore the confidence of the common man in our democratic system.

The proposal to appoint a Lok Pal has been discussed for several years. We are making this institution a reality by introducing a Bill in the Parliament.

We are committed to bringing about sweeping reforms in our election system. We will examine all important suggestions that have been made for electoral reforms. The aim of these reforms should be to eliminate the role of money and muscle power, removal of other unfair practices and ensuring accountability of the political parties.

As a beginning we have made amendments in electoral laws which provide for deterrent punishments for some electoral offences such as booth capturing, discourages non-serious candidates and reduce the campaign period.

Formation of a separate state is a long pending demand of the people of Uttarakhand. Our Government has taken an important decision to fulfill this demand. We will shortly introduce a Bill for the formation of Uttarakhand state.

As per the provisions of the Constitution this Bill would be placed before the State Legislature after the ensuing Vidhan Sabha Elections in U.P. for their views. Later this Bill would be placed before the Parliament so

that the State of Uttarakhand could be formed soon.

We believe that this decision of the Government will fulfil the hopes and aspirations of the people of Uttarakhand.

In today's world, there is no substitute for higher economic growth. The strength and stability of a nation depends upon the growth of its economy.

This is also essential for achieving our cherishment goals of self-reliance, modernisation and the eradication of poverty. We should learn to use the opportunities thrown up by the international, technological and financial developments.

Our task now is to release the creative energies to the people by shedding outdated controls and regulations.

Focus upon the well-being of the poor is an essential part of our economic philosophy. It is necessary to ensure that the fruits of growth reach the poor and the inequalities in incomes and opportunities are narrowed.

While promoting industrial growth, we cannot neglect Agriculture. Without high agricultural development, it will not be possible for us to achieve either rapid economic growth or the removal of poverty.

High economic growth can be achieved not by shout slogans but by determined efforts to provide more watt electricity, roads, new technologies, fertilizers and adequate credit.

We have already initiated steps to increase investment in agriculture. The prices of phosphate and potassic fertilizers have been brought down considerably by increasing the quantum of concession given on these fertilizers. This will increase the output of our farmers and lead to their economic betterment.

Farmers need more water for their lands. We will involve a National Policy on water sharing and, water management.

There are several issues relating to sharing and use of water and

resettlement of people affected by irrigation projects. These issues need to be resolved through negotiations in the best interests of the nation.

The recent Agreement reached by Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Rajasthan on the Sardar Sarovar Project shows how such issues can be resolved through discussions.

I am concerned that we have not been able to provide basic minimum services to our people, especially the poor living in the rural and urban areas even after so many years of independence.

The faith and the confidence of our people in the ability of the Government, will ultimately depend on our providing these services to every citizen.

I had convened a Conference of Chief Ministers in Delhi last month in which it was decided that there should be provisions of Safe Drinking Water for all in rural and urban areas; Primary Health Care facilities for all; University and Primary Education; Housing Assistance for all poor families without shelter and more all weather roads for villages.

There should be provision for Mid-day Meals in Primary Schools in the villages and urban slums.

The Conference decided to draw up programmes to achieve concrete results by the year 2000.

More money will be spent on Basic Minimum services and development of drought and desert areas and for the welfare of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Minorities.

The people living in urban slums have not received adequate support in the past for their housing civic amenities. We are making a provision of Rs. 250 this year for this purpose.

There will be greater involvement of the State in the implementation of these programmes.

We will enhance the provision for rural development.

The jurisdiction of Panchayati Raj provision has been extended and

more powers have been given to them.

Our economy provides ample new opportunities for productive work, especially in self-employment. The educated youth from poor families can benefit immensely from these opportunities.

At present there are several schemes for self-employment. We propose to introduce a unified self-employment programme for educated unemployed youth in rural and urban areas to benefit 10 lakh youths in 1996-97.

They will be provided training facilities and enhanced subsidy and credit support. This step would benefit our youth in large numbers irrespective of caste, religion or any other differentiation.

I am particularly concerned about the artisans, craftspersons, weavers and fishermen, who should also benefit from new opportunities.

At present, there is a scheme to provide a minimum of 100 days employment in a year to anyone seeking work from poor households. This scheme is operating in only 5 out of every 10 blocks in the country.

Our Government will extend the scheme to cover all blocks within the next two years.

The functioning of the Public Distribution Systems has been widely criticised. It has failed to serve the people of several States. We have now decided to extend, in a manner, the Public Distribution System to provide up to 20 kilograms of rice and wheat every month to the poor families on half the normal price.

The scheme will come into operation from "Gandhi Jayanti" 2nd October, 1996 and when fully implemented 34 crore poor people will be benefited.

Our Government symbolizes the empowerment of the downtrodden, the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes and the backward classes. We want to enhance their dignity and self-confidence.

The Central and State Governments will have to take steps for

bringing economic freedom, education and more opportunities for them.

Most people belonging to these groups are even landless or small farmers. Their land is unproductive because of the lack of land development and irrigation. This had to be attended to.

We have decided to introduce a "Ganga Kalyan" Scheme for providing assistance to poor cultivators belonging to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes and other backward classes. They will be given upto Rs. 50,000 per hectare for land development, horticulture and irrigation facilities.

One of the most vulnerable sections of the society continue to be women, who constitute nearly half of our population. We should not neglect their right to get their due share in the Governance of the country. We have already announced our plan to reserve one third of the seats in State legislature and the Parliament for women. A similar initiative to reserve one third of the posts for women in Government is also under consideration.

Although a comprehensive law has been passed by Parliament, opportunities for persons with disabilities, are not uniform. We are committed to effective implementation of the Law for the Protection of Rights of the Disabled in consultation with the State Governments.

In each State there is need for an apex institution for training and basic rehabilitation services. Similarly, in every district, a centre for rehabilitation of the people affected by various disabilities, and vocational training facilities is needed.

We shall take steps to ensure that reservations in employment for disabled persons are uniformly implemented and welfare measures aimed at them are improved.

Groups of disabled persons living in the villages will be organised into "Sangams" and a sum of Rs. 15,000 will be made available to each such "Sangam" for suitable economic activities.

We have the distinction of being the biggest democracy in the world. We are proud of it.



Many of the gains of development are offset due to unchecked growth in our population. Some States like Haryana and Punjab have achieved commendable results in reducing population growth.

It is important that in all other States people and the Government work together to achieve tangible results in promoting the small family norm so that the gains of development reach everybody.

On this occasion, I salute our Armed Forces, who are bravely performing their duty in different parts of our country, many times under conditions of extreme hardship. We are proud of their achievements and dedication to service.

We will maintain the morale, equipment and readiness of our security forces at the highest level.

We take this opportunity to pay tribute to our Defence services and security forces for the sacrifices they have made for the country.

We have to take note of the induction of the new sophisticated arms in our vicinity.

I want to assure the country that meeting of the security needs is a matter of priority for us.

We shall not compromise on issues of defence and nation security.

Our indigenous capability will be enhanced and strengthened in every way.

We have made progress in building our own tanks, our own combat aircrafts and developing our missiles like Agni and Prithvi. All these programmes will be continued within the framework already established.

A word about the good work done by our scientists: not only have they contributed to our defence capability, but also to our civilian programmes.

Space research is an area where we can be justly proud of what we have achieved. In March this year we achieved the second successful launch of our Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle which placed a remote-sensing

satellite in the space. We are among a handful countries in the world that have this capability.

Our foreign policy is dedicated by our national interests. These are wide-ranging and include establishing our ability to influence the external environment.

Our priority is to evolve better relations with our neighbours.

We seek actively to promote cooperation both bilaterally and within the framework of the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation.

We are willing to settle all outstanding issues through dialogue and call upon our neighbours to response positively.

We are active members of the United Nations. We have made signal contributions to the Peace-keeping operation of the UN and have vigorously promoted the social and economic agenda of the UN.

We believe we have a legitimate claim to serve as a permanent member of the expanded Security Council.

The Security Council should truly reflect the expanded membership of the UN and developing countries must be included as permanent members.

Global security today demands a universal appraisal to disarmament. We have concluded treaties for the elimination of chemical and biological weapons.

It is now necessary to tackle nuclear weapons, and last remaining category of weapons of mass destruction. Visualised the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty as apart process of global nuclear disarmament, leading to the complete elimination of all nuclear weapons, within reasonable time horizon. This, the nuclear weapon States are unwilling to accept and are seeking to perpetuate their monopoly on nuclear weapons. We cannot agree to this.

We have also to take note of the open as well as clandestine nuclear programmes in our immediate neighbourhood. Therefore, we have made it

clear that India will oppose a Test-ban Treaty that imposes unacceptable conditions on us. The country is behind us in our stand and we will not compromise in matter of national security.

Countrymen, we are today entering the 50th Year of our Independence. The time has come for all of us to take stock of our successes and failures.

The achievements since Independence - and there are many and they should encourage and inspire us to do more to take the nation forward.

The mistakes committed in the past should make us ask where we went wrong. The successes should not go to our head because a lot remains to be accomplished. The mistakes and failures should not discourage us and push us into a state of inertia.

The world is changing fast and is not going to wait for us to catch up. We have to shed our complacency and move ahead so that India can find its rightful place in the world.

This is a crucial moment in our history. The nation is poised to emerge as a strong economic power in the next few years.

The people have to remain alert and protect the honour and dignity of the nation. Our forefathers have told the Mantra of self-reliance. We have learnt to depend essentially on our own resources. There are external pressures and internal problems. If the Situation warrants then the country should stand up as one to face any such crisis.

A century of freedom struggle and the experiences since Independence have given us the confidence that a bright and prosperous future can be built.

Our biggest asset are the people - 95 core of them whether they are working in fields producing foodgrains, as skilled workers in industrial plants, or scientist in laboratories, or jawans guarding our frontiers, or the youth they are all contributing to the collective effort to build a strong India.

When a great nation wakes up and begins to move ahead nothing

can stop it in its tracks.

We are drawing close to the end of an even a century which saw the awakening of the nation. We now prepare ourselves for the 21st century.

It is the duty of the Government, every political party, the intelligentsia and all citizens of the land to seize this great moment and build a new India. I have great faith in the people of India. We should all look to the future with hope, courage and self-confidence.

On this historic day, I appeal to all countrymen to resolve to work for an India where every citizen - irrespective of caste, creed and religion - can hold his or her head high.

I now invite you to join in raising the national slogan with me: Jai Hind, Jai Hind, Jai Hind.