

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS TO THE NATION ON THE EVE OF INDIA'S 67TH INDEPENDENCE DAY

Fellow citizens:

1. On the eve of the 66th anniversary of our Independence, I extend warm greetings to you and to all Indians around the world.
2. My thoughts turn first towards the Father of our Nation, Mahatma Gandhi, who shaped our liberation struggle and the martyrs who made supreme sacrifice for the freedom of our country and great patriots whose relentless struggle liberated our motherland from the colonial rule of nearly two hundred years. Gandhiji sought freedom from both foreign rule as well as the indigenous social chains that had imprisoned our society for long. He launched every Indian on a path of self-belief and hope for a better future. Gandhiji promised Swaraj- self-rule based on tolerance and self-restraint. He promised freedom from want and deprivation. For nearly seven decades now we have been masters of our destiny. This is then the moment to ask: are we heading in the right direction? Gandhiji's vision cannot be turned into reality if we spurn the very values that were compulsory to his cause: sincerity of effort, honesty of purpose and sacrifice for the larger good.
3. Our founding fathers created the first oasis in the desert of a colonized world nourished by democracy. Democracy is much more than the right to vote every five years; its essence is the aspirations of the masses; its spirit must influence the responsibilities of the leaders and duties of the citizens every day. Democracy breathes through a vibrant Parliament, an independent judiciary, a responsible media, a vigilant civil society, and a bureaucracy committed to integrity and hard work. It survives through accountability, not profligacy. And yet we have allowed unbridled personal enrichment, self-indulgence, intolerance, discourtesy in behavior and disrespect for authority to erode our work culture. The biggest impact of the decay in the moral fiber of our society is on the hopes and aspirations of the young and the poor. Mahatma Gandhi had advised us to avoid, and I quote, "politics without principles, wealth without work, pleasure without conscience, knowledge without character, commerce without morality, science without humanity, and worship without sacrifice", (unquote). We have to pay heed to his advice as we work towards building a modern democracy. The ideals of patriotism, compassion, tolerance, self-restraint, honesty, discipline and respect for women have to be converted into a living force.

Fellow citizens:

4. Institutions are a mirror of national character. Today we see widespread cynicism and disillusionment with the governance and functioning of institutions in our country. Our legislatures look more like combat arenas, rather than fora that legislate. Corruption has become a major challenge. The precious resources of the nation are being wasted through indolence and indifference. It is sapping the dynamism of our society. We need to correct this regression.

5. Our Constitution provides a delicate balance of power between various institutions of the State. This balance has to be maintained. We need a Parliament that debates, discusses and decides. We need a judiciary that gives justice without delays. We need leadership that is committed to the nation and those values that made us a great civilization. We need a state that inspires confidence among people in its ability to surmount challenges before us. We need a media and citizens who, even as they claim their rights, are equally committed to their responsibilities.

Fellow citizens:

6. A re-ordering of the society can be brought about through the educational system. We cannot aspire to be a world class power without a single world class university. History records that we were the cynosure of the world once. Takshashila, Nalanda, Vikramashila, Valabhi, Somapura and Odantapuri comprised the ancient university system that dominated the world for eighteen hundred years beginning Sixth Century BC. They were a magnet for the finest minds and scholars in the world. We must seek to regain that space. A university is the banyan tree whose roots lie in basic education, in a vast network of schools that build the intellectual prowess of our communities; we have to invest in every part of this knowledge tree, from seed, root and branch to the highest leaf.

Fellow Citizens:

7. There is a direct relationship between a successful democracy and a successful economy, for we are a people-driven nation. People serve their interests best when they participate in decision-making at the level of panchayat and other forms of local government. We have to rapidly empower the local bodies with functions, functionaries and finances to improve their performance. Faster growth has given us the resources, but larger outlays have not translated into better outcomes. Without inclusive governance, we cannot achieve inclusive growth.

8. For a developing country of more than 1.2 billion people, the debate between growth and redistribution is vital. While growth builds the scope for redistribution, redistribution sustains growth over time. Both are equally important. A disproportionate emphasis on any one, at the expense of the other, can have adverse consequences for the nation.

9. The last decade has seen India emerge as one of the fastest growing nations in the world. During this period, our economy grew annually at an average rate of 7.9 per cent. We are today self-sufficient in food grains production. We are the largest exporter of rice and second largest exporter of wheat in the world. The record production of 18.45 million tonne of pulses this year augurs well for our march towards self-sufficiency in pulses. This was unthinkable just a few years ago. This momentum has to be sustained. In a globalized world, with increasing economic complexities, we have to learn to cope better with adversities, both external and domestic.

Fellow citizens:

10. At the dawn of our Independence, we lit the glowing lamp of modernity and equitable economic growth. To keep this lamp aflame, our highest priority has to be the elimination of poverty. Though a declining trend in the poverty rate is clearly visible, our fight against this scourge is far from over. India has the talent, ability and the resources to overcome this challenge.

11. Reforms that have enabled us to come this far have to be pursued at all levels of governance. Favorable demographic changes over the next two decades can pay us handsome dividends. It requires industrial transformation and rapid creation of employment opportunities. It also requires an orderly urbanization process. Several initiatives taken by the Government in the recent past including the New Manufacturing Policy, the renewal of urban infrastructure and the ambitious skill training programme will need close monitoring in the coming years.

12. We have given our citizens entitlements backed by legal guarantees in terms of right to employment, education, food and information. We now have to ensure that these entitlements lead to real empowerment for the people. We need robust delivery mechanisms to make these legislations work. New benchmarks of efficient public service delivery and accountability have to be established. The Direct Benefits Transfer Scheme, launched earlier this year, will bring in greater transparency, enhance efficiency and eliminate wastage of precious resources.

Fellow citizens:

13. In our race for development, we must be careful not to disturb the balance between man and nature. The consequences of such imbalance can be disastrous. My heartfelt condolences to the many who lost their lives, and the innumerable who suffered in Uttarakhand; and my salutations to those brave personnel of our security and armed forces, government and NGOs who did so much to alleviate suffering. This tragedy owes as much to the avarice of human nature as to the rage of Mother Nature. This was nature's wake-up call. And it is time to wake up.

14. We have seen in the recent past grave challenges to our security, internal as well as external. The barbaric face of Maoist violence in Chhattisgarh led to a loss of many innocent lives. Despite India's consistent efforts to build friendly relations with neighbours, there have been tensions on the border and repeated violations of the Ceasefire on the Line of Control, leading to tragic loss of lives. Our commitment to peace is unfailing but even our patience has limits. All steps necessary to ensure internal security and protect the territorial integrity of the nation will be taken. I applaud the courage and heroism of our security and armed forces who maintain eternal vigilance and pay homage to those who have made the supreme sacrifice of the most precious gift of life in the service of the motherland.

15. There will be a general election in our country before I have the privilege of addressing you again on the eve of our next independence day. This great festival of democracy, is an opportunity for us to elect a stable government which will ensure security and economic development. Every election must become a crucial milestone in our nation's journey towards greater social harmony, peace and prosperity.

16. Democracy has given us an opportunity to re-create another golden age. Let us not squander this extraordinary opportunity. The journey ahead calls for wisdom, courage and determination. We must work on across-the-board revival of our values and institutions. We must realize that rights go with responsibilities. We must re-discover the virtue of self-scrutiny and self-restraint.

17. Let me conclude by quoting from the great classic Bhagvad Gita where the Teacher propounds his views and then says, and I quote, "yatha icchasi tatha kuru" "even as you choose, so you do. I do not wish to impose my views on you. I have presented to you what I think is right. Now it is for your conscience, for your judgment, for your mind to decide what is right." (unquote)

On your decisions rests the future of our democracy.

JAI HIND!