

President's Secretariat

Address by The President of India Shri Ram Nath Kovind on The Eve of The Republic Day of India 2018

My Dear Fellow Citizens

Greetings to all of you on the eve of our 69th Republic Day. This is a day for all of us to celebrate and honour our nation and our sovereignty. This is a day to remember with gratitude the enormous efforts and sacrifices of millions of freedom fighters whose blood and sweat gave us Independence and created our Republic. Above all, this is a day to cherish our republican values.

A Republic is its people. Citizens do not just make up and preserve a Republic; they are its ultimate stakeholders and in fact pillars. Each one of us is a pillar – the soldier who defends our Republic; the farmer who feeds our Republic; the forces that keep our Republic safe; the mother who nurtures our Republic; the doctor who heals our Republic; the nurse who tends to our Republic; the sanitation worker who makes our Republic cleaner and hygienic; the teacher who educates our Republic; the scientist who innovates for our Republic; the missile technologist who puts our Republic on a new trajectory; the wise tribal who conserves the ecology of our Republic; the engineer who re-imagines our Republic; the construction worker who builds our Republic; senior citizens who can look back with pride at how far they have brought our Republic; the youth in whom lie the energy, hopes and future of our Republic; and our dear children, who dream for our Republic.

There are so many more who contribute to our Republic in diverse ways and whom I may have missed mentioning. Happy Republic Day to all of you.

India became a Republic on January 26, 1950. This was the second major milestone in our nation building process. Independence had come a little over two years earlier. But it was with the framing and adoption of the Constitution – and the birth of the Republic of India – that we truly achieved the ethic of equality among all citizens, irrespective of religion, region or community. This ethic of equality complemented the liberty that had come at Independence. And a third principle also defined both the cooperative efforts at creating our Republic as well as the India that we wished to be. This was the principle of fraternity.

Independence had come after a great struggle in which millions had participated. They gave their all; many gave their lives. Inspired and led by Mahatma Gandhi, the men and women who took us to freedom could have rested on the gaining of Independence. They could have let down their guard, and remained satisfied with political freedom. But they did not rest. Instead, they re-doubled their efforts. They immersed themselves in the process of writing a Constitution. They saw the Constitution not just as a basic law for a new nation, but as a scripture for social transformation.

Our Constitution framers were men and women with great foresight. They understood the majesty of the rule of law, and of rule by laws. They represented an important phase in our national life. We are fortunate to have inherited its legacy in the form of the Constitution and the Republic.

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The lessons from that formative period, the period that gave shape to our Republic, serve us well to this day. They serve us well in whatever we do, wherever we work, whichever goal we aim for. These lessons continue to spur our nation building project. Nation building is a grand project. But it is also the compilation of a million – rather, a billion – smaller projects, each as sacred as the other. Nation building is also about building a family, building a neighbourhood, building a community, building an enterprise, building an institution. And building society.

A happy and equal-opportunity nation is built by happy and equal-opportunity families and communities. Families where girls have the same rights and the same access to education and healthcare as boys. Governments can bring in policies and laws to ensure justice to women – but these policies and laws can only be made effective by families and communities that must hear the voices of our daughters. We cannot shut our ears to their urgings for change.

A confident and forward-looking nation is built by confident and forward-looking young people. Over 60 per cent of our fellow citizens are below the age of 35. It is in them that our hopes lie. We have made strides in spreading literacy; now we must expand the frontiers of education and of knowledge. Our aspiration must be to reform, upgrade and enlarge our education system – and to make it relevant to 21st century realities of the digital economy, genomics, robotics and automation.

Many programmes and initiatives have been launched to equip our youth with the education and skills to compete in a globalised world. Sizeable resources have been set aside for these programmes. It is for our talented young people to make the most of these opportunities.

An innovative nation is built by innovative children. This must be our obsessive goal. Our schooling system has to encourage our children to think and to tinker, not just to memorise and reproduce. We have made strides in tackling hunger, but the challenge of malnutrition and of bringing the right micronutrients to the plate of every child is still there. This is important for both physical and cognitive development of our children – and for the future of our country. We simply have to invest in our human capital.

A civic-minded nation is built by civic-minded neighbourhoods, whether in our cities or our villages. Where we respect the next-door person's space, privacy and rights. Where we do not inconvenience our neighbours – while celebrating a festival or while resorting to a protest or on any other occasion. Where one can disagree with another viewpoint – or even with a historical context - without mocking a fellow citizen's dignity and personal space. This is fraternity in action.

A nation with a sense of selflessness is built by citizens and by a society that embraces selflessness. Where voluntary groups clean public places such as beaches and rivers. And care for orphaned children and homeless people, and even for homeless animals. Where we donate blood or a body organ to help a fellow citizen who may be a stranger to us. Where idealistic individuals travel to remote places to

teach children, and change their lives with the magic of education. They do so not because anybody has asked them to, but because of a call from within.

Where a better-off family voluntarily gives up an entitlement – it could be subsidised LPG today and some other entitlement tomorrow – so that another family, which has a greater need, can avail it. Let us all collate our privileges and entitlements. And then look at less-privileged members of a similar background, those who are starting off from where we once started off. And let each of us introspect and ask: Is his need or her need greater than mine? The spirit of philanthropy and of giving is part of our age-old culture. Let us renew it.

A culturally vibrant nation is built by a collective will that cherishes and preserves cultural traditions, art forms and handicrafts. Whether these be folk theatre artistes, traditional musicians, weavers and handloom workers, or those whose families have been hand-making marvellous wooden toys for centuries. Or day-to-day articles made of bamboo.

A disciplined and morally upright nation is built by disciplined and morally upright institutions. Institutions that respect their fraternal relationship with other institutions. Institutions that maintain the integrity, discipline and limits of their functioning, without compromising on excellence. Institutions that are always more important than the individuals located there. And institutions where the holders and members make every attempt to live up to the office they occupy as trustees of the people.

And of course the highest stage of India's nation building project is to contribute to building a better world – a composite and cohesive world, a world at peace with itself and at peace with nature. This is the ideal of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam – of the World being One Family. It is an ideal that may sound impractical in today's times of tensions and of terrorism. But it is an ideal that has inspired India for thousands of years – and that ideal can be felt in the very texture of our constitutional values. The principles of compassion, of assisting those in need, of building capacities of our neighbours, or even of those further away, underpin our society. These are the very principles that we bring to the international community.

Such principles are also meant for our global Indian family. When Indians living abroad face humanitarian or similar challenges, it is natural for us as a country to reach out to them. We have, and we will continue to do so.

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I referred earlier to that glorious period between Independence and our first Republic Day. This was a period of constant striving – of dedication, determination and commitment to improving our country. And setting right the aberrations of our society. Today, we are at a similar juncture. We have achieved a lot as a nation, but much remains to be done. We need to work on this in the spirit of the generation that gave us our Republic.

In 2020, our Republic will turn 70. In 2022, we will celebrate the 75th anniversary of our Independence. These are special occasions and we must strive, in the manner of the leaders of our national movement and the framers of our Constitution, to build the edifice of a better India – an India where each and every citizen will be able to realise

his or her full potential. An India that will reach its deserved pedestal in the 21st century.

We need to further improve the lives of our hardworking farmers. Like mothers, they toil to feed us – more than a billion of us. We need to continue to modernise and strengthen our strategic manufacturing sector so as to provide the valiant personnel of our Armed Forces, and our police and paramilitary forces, the equipment that they need. We need to move ahead rapidly on the Sustainable Development Goals – Goals that commit us to eliminating poverty and hunger, to universal access to quality education and healthcare, and to giving our daughters equal opportunity in every field. We need to make clean, green, efficient and affordable energy reach our people. We need to ensure that housing for all becomes a living reality for the millions of families who await their own home. We need to craft a modern India that is both a land of talent – and a land of unlimited opportunities for that talent.

Above all, our Republic cannot rest and cannot be satisfied without meeting the basic needs and essential dignity of our less well-off brothers and sisters. I refer to those from a less privileged socio-economic background, from the weaker communities and from families that still live at the edge of poverty. It is our sacred obligation to eliminate the curse of poverty in the shortest possible time. This is non-negotiable for the Republic.

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The promise of a developed India beckons us. This is the new stage of our nation building project on which we have embarked. This is the Republic that our young people need to take forward and enhance – in keeping with their vision, their ambition and their ideals. And their vision, ambition and ideals, I am confident, will always draw inspiration from both our republican values – as well as from our ancient Indian ethos.

With those words, I once again wish all of you a very happy Republic Day. And wish all of you a very bright and fulfilling future.

Thank you

JAI HIND!