

My dear countrymen, I heartily greet 120 crore Indians on the 64th anniversary of our independence.

I have been addressing you from the historic Red Fort for the last seven years. In these seven years, our country has achieved much. During this period, we have travelled rapidly on the path of development and have seen success in many areas.

However, I am also well aware that a lot remains to be done. We have to banish poverty and illiteracy from our country. We have to provide the common man with access to improved health services. We have to provide employment opportunities to each one of our youth. The road ahead is long and arduous.

Particularly, the prevailing situation both inside and outside the country is such that if we do not act with understanding and restraint, our security and prosperity can get adversely affected.

The world economy is slowing down. The developed countries especially America and countries of Western Europe are facing economic problems. There is unrest in many Arab countries of the Middle East.

There are some people who want to create disturbances in the country so that our progress gets stalled. All this can have a negative impact on us. But we will not let this happen. I know that if we work together, we can face any challenge.

However, it is necessary that we rise above personal or political interests and build consensus on issues of vital national importance.

Brothers and sisters, We are building the edifice of modern India on the foundation of the hard work and sacrifices of our soldiers, our farmers and our workers. We will not let their hard work and sacrifices go waste.

We will convert the dreams of our freedom fighters into reality.

Brothers and sisters, In the last seven years, our government has strived for political stability and social and economic progress. We have established an environment of communal harmony in the country.

In these seven years, the pace of our economic development has been rapid. We have achieved this success despite the global economic slow-down of 2008 and rising prices of energy and commodities in world markets. We have strived for reducing inequalities in the country.

In the last seven years, we have taken special care of the needs of our brothers and sisters from the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, minorities, women and children. We have enacted laws which would guarantee our people their basic entitlements.

After the rights to education, employment and information, we will soon enact a legislation for providing food security to the people.

In the last seven years, our relations with various countries of the world have strengthened and deepened. It is only the result of our hard work that today we have much more self respect and self-confidence in ourselves.

Brothers and sisters, These successes are not ordinary. Today the world recognises our potential to be one of the major economic powers globally. But the problem of corruption is a big obstacle in such a transformation.

In the last few months many instances of corruption have come to light. In some cases, functionaries of the Central government face allegations of corruption. In other cases, it is the functionaries of various State governments.

We are taking the strictest possible action in cases of corruption that have surfaced. These cases are sub-judice and hence I will say nothing more on this subject.

It is essential that when we consider these issues, we do not create an atmosphere in which the country's progress comes into question. Any debate on these matters should reflect the confidence that we can overcome these challenges.

Corruption manifests itself in many forms. In some instances, funds meant for schemes for the welfare of the common man end up in the pocket of government officials. In some other instances government discretion is used to favour a selected few.

There are also cases where government contracts are wrongfully awarded to the wrong people. We cannot let such activities continue unchecked. I believe that there is no single big step which we can take to eradicate corruption. In fact, we will have to act simultaneously on many fronts. We will have to improve our justice delivery system.

Everyone should know that quick action will be taken against the corrupt and punishment meted out to them. If our system delivers justice in an effective manner, government officials would think twice before committing a wrong act out of greed or under political pressure.

We want a strong Lokpal to prevent corruption in high places. We have recently introduced a Bill in Parliament to achieve this. Now only Parliament can decide what type of Lokpal legislation should be enacted. I am aware of the differences of opinion on some aspects of the Bill.

Those who don't agree with this Bill can put forward their views to Parliament, political parties and even the press. However, I also believe that they should not resort to hunger strikes and fasts unto death. It is not appropriate to bring the judiciary under the ambit of Lokpal.

We believe that any such provision would go against the independence of the judiciary. However, we do need a framework in which the judiciary becomes more accountable. It is with this aim that we have introduced the Judicial Accountability Bill in Parliament. I am confident that this Bill will be passed soon.

An alert press and an aware citizenry can be very helpful in the fight against corruption. The Indian press is known for its independence and activism throughout the world.

The Right to Information legislation that we have enacted has enabled our press and people to keep a strict watch on the work of the government.

Today many government decisions, which in the absence of this Act would escape public scrutiny, are coming to light. I believe that this is a big step forward in eradicating corruption.

Brothers and Sisters, Many times, government discretion is misused in allocation of scarce resources and in the grant of clearances. We have examined this issue. We will put an end to such discretionary powers wherever possible.

Any government awards contracts worth thousands of crores every year. There are frequent complaints of corruption in these decisions. We had constituted a committee to suggest measures to reduce corruption in government purchases.

The committee has recommended that, like many other countries, we should also have a public procurement legislation which lays down the principles and practice with regard to government purchases. We will introduce a Bill in Parliament by the end of this year to enact such a law.

In recent years, we have established independent regulatory authorities in many areas. These authorities discharge many responsibilities which were earlier in the domain of the government itself.

We have no legislation which would enable monitoring of the work of these regulatory authorities and make them more accountable, without, however, compromising their independence. We are also considering enactment of such a law.

Brothers and sisters, I have said so much on corruption because I know that this problem is a matter of deep concern for all of us. However, this is a difficulty for which no government has a magic wand.

We are taking simultaneous action on many fronts in our fight against corruption. We want all political parties to stand shoulder to shoulder with us in this fight. To eradicate corruption, we have introduced, and will introduce, many Bills in Parliament. I hope that all political parties will cooperate in the process of converting these Bills into statutes.

On the issue of corruption, I would like to say in the end that we can win the fight against corruption only when each and every citizen of India cooperates in it.

Brothers and sisters, I congratulate the country's farmers for their achievements this year. The production of foodgrains has been at a record level. Wheat, maize, pulses and oilseeds have all seen record levels of production.

It is because of the hard work of our farmers that today there are proposals for export of foodgrains, sugar and cotton. We need a second Green Revolution in agriculture.

We can tackle the problem of rising food prices only by increasing agricultural production and productivity. We also need to increase agricultural production to implement a food security law. We will accelerate our efforts in this direction in the 12th Plan.

Today, I wish to assure our farmer brothers and sisters, particularly those who are small and marginal, that we will continue to take care of their special needs. It will be our endeavour to ensure that our farmers have easy access to fertilizers, seeds and credit.

We also want to provide the best possible irrigation facilities to the farmers so that their dependence on rains is reduced.

Brothers and sisters, Our country is passing through a phase of sustained high inflation. Controlling rising prices is a primary responsibility of any government. Our government fully understands this responsibility. We have continuously taken steps to rein in prices.

Some time we have been confronted with a situation in which the reasons for rising prices lay outside the country. The prices of petroleum products, foodgrains and edible oil have risen steeply in international markets in recent times.

Since we import these products in large quantities, any rise in their prices adds to inflationary pressure in our country. Sometimes we have been successful too in controlling inflation. But this success has not proved lasting.

A few days back, the people's concern at rising prices was also reflected in a discussion in Parliament.

I wish to assure you today that we are continuously monitoring the situation to find out what new steps can be taken to arrest rising prices. Finding a solution to this problem will be our top-most priority in the coming months.

Brothers and sisters, I am fully aware of the tensions caused in some parts of the country because of acquisition of land for industry, infrastructure and urbanization. Our farmers have been especially affected by such acquisition. Land acquisition is no doubt necessary for projects of public interest. But it should take place in a transparent and fair manner.

The interests of those whose livelihoods are dependent on the land being acquired should be fully protected. We will ensure that no injustice is done to anyone in the process of land acquisition.

Our government wants to replace the 117 year old land acquisition law by a new Land Acquisition and Rehabilitation law which is forward looking and balanced. We have already prepared a draft legislation and have initiated steps to build consensus on it. We will soon introduce a Bill in Parliament to this end.

Brothers and sisters, We are satisfied with our achievements in the last seven years in the areas of education and health.

Whether it is elementary education, secondary education or higher education we have taken concrete steps for improvements at all levels. This has shown good results.

In the last few years, fundamental changes have taken place in the area of education. Today every citizen has a right to elementary education. We are now considering universalization of secondary education.

Vocational education and skill development have acquired a new importance. In view of these major changes, it is necessary that we consider all aspects of education in a comprehensive manner.

Therefore we have decided to appoint an education commission to make recommendations for improvements at all levels of education.

I have often referred to the 11th Five Year Plan as an education plan. We will lay the same emphasis on health in the 12th plan as we laid on education in the 11th plan. I will propose to the National Development Council that the 12th plan should be specially focused on health.

I also promise that funds will not be a constraint in the important areas of education and health. For a long time our country had no facility for health insurance for workers in the unorganized sector.

In 2008, we began the Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana for workers in the unorganized sector who are below the poverty line.

In the last year we have covered those getting employment under Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Act and also domestic workers, street vendors and beedi workers under this scheme.

Today the Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana covers about 2 crore 50 lakh workers. Our government will endeavour to cover as many unorganized sector workers as possible under this scheme.

Brothers and sisters, We are continuously strengthening the physical infrastructure in our country. This is an area which requires very large investments. It is for this reason that in the last seven years we have pursued policies which encourage investment in infrastructure.

As a percentage of GDP, investment in this area has grown more than one and a half times in the last seven years.

There have been improvements in our capacities in the petroleum sector and power generation, and in our airports, roads, especially rural road, and ports.

As an illustration, the capacity in power generation that we are going to add in the 11th plan will be twice that of the 10th plan. In the 12th Plan, we will further accelerate investment in infrastructure.

We will pay special attention to the remote areas of our country and to rural areas. Connecting such areas by rail and road will get the top most priority.

Brothers and sisters, We have taken a major step this year for our poor brothers and sisters living in cities.

Recently we have approved the Rajiv Awas Yojana. We want to make India slum free through this scheme. We want the slum dwellers to get ownership of clean houses and have access to basic amenities like water and electricity.

We will implement the Rajiv Awas Yojana as a national mission together with the States.

Brothers and sisters, Malnutrition in our women and children is a matter of concern for all of us. We have taken a number of steps to tackle this problem, including two new schemes.

We have also decided that we will start implementing an improved Integrated Child Development Services scheme within the next six months so that the problem of malnutrition in children can be effectively addressed. The figures of census 2011 show improvements in most areas.

But it is a matter of deep regret for us that the sex ratio has shown a decline from the level of the last census.

For an improvement in this state of affairs, it is not only necessary to implement the existing laws

effectively but it is also essential to change the approach with which our society views girls and women.

I would especially appeal to the State governments and social service organizations to take steps for empowerment of women and for improving their status in society.

Brothers and sisters, Last month's terrorists attacks in Mumbai warn us that there cannot be any slip up in our vigilance as far as the fight against terrorism is concerned.

This is a long battle to be fought jointly by the Central Government, the State Governments and the common man. We have been steadily strengthening our intelligence and security agencies and will continue to do so in the future also.

We are also taking all possible steps to overcome the challenge of Naxalism. We want to eradicate the very reasons which give rise to this problem. Therefore we have started a new scheme for the accelerated development of 60 backward and tribal dominated districts.

An amount of Rs.3300 crore will be spent on this scheme in a period of two years.

Brothers and sisters, Preserving our environment even as we develop rapidly is a huge challenge for us.

Climate change poses a threat to both our development processes and our natural resources. We have established eight missions on climate change and are working hard to implement these missions.

We have set up the National Ganga River Basin Authority for the protection and cleaning of river Ganga.

We have also established the National Green Tribunal for quick disposal of cases involving environmental issues.

In the coming months, we will constitute an environmental assessment and monitoring authority to streamline the process of environmental clearances.

Brothers and sisters, Our society and country are changing rapidly because of our fast economic growth.

Today our people look towards the future with new hope. They have higher aspirations. Our young men and women strive for path breaking achievements.

We should all build an environment in the country in which the energy and enthusiasm of the people are channelised into activities of nation building.

Our institutions should encourage constructive utilization of the potential of our people. Our entrepreneurs and businessmen should not feel constrained in their activities.

Our industrialists should have the opportunity to set up new industries so that our youth can get additional avenues for productive employment.

We should all stay away from politics that create suspicion or apprehension amongst those connected

with industry, business and investment.

Brothers and sisters, It is not an ordinary achievement for our democracy with a population of 120 crore and so many religions, languages and cultures to march rapidly ahead on the path of development.

I congratulate the people of India on this achievement.

But we must ensure that inequalities do not increase even as we develop rapidly. We have embarked on a journey to transform our huge and diverse country through rapid development.

A development which benefits every citizen of the country. It is natural that tensions would sometimes arise in this process of change. In a democracy, such tensions also become issues of political polarization.

We should endeavour that even as political parties oppose and engage in debate against each other, the pace of our progress does not get affected.

We should also have faith that our democracy, our institutions and our social ideals and values have the capacity to deal with any difficulty. We should all have faith in ourselves.

The faith that we can build a promising future for ourselves. The faith, that united we can do the most difficult of tasks. Let us all resolve to build a bright future for our country.

Dear Children, join me in saying Jai Hind Jai Hind Jai Hind.