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Address to The Nation by **SHRI K.R. NARAYANAN, PRESIDENT OF INDIA** on the Occasion of the Closing Function of the **GOLDEN JUBILEE OF INDIA'S INDEPENDENCE** *Central Hall of Parliament, New Delhi — August 15, 1998*

A year ago on August 15 I had the privilege of addressing you at the inauguration of the Golden Jubilee celebrations of our Independence. I have now the pleasure of speaking to you again at the conclusion of these celebrations. I would, at the outset, like to extend my greetings to my fellow citizens, the men and women, and the youth and the children of India.

The golden jubilee celebrations are drawing to a close, but the spirit of August 15, and the ideals and the aspirations symbolized by it, remain to be pursued with dedication and with renewed vigour — “the ending of poverty and ignorance and disease and inequality of opportunity”, as Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru urged at that mid-night hour.

Thanks to the values bequeathed to us by our age-old culture and civilization, and revived and revitalized in the prolonged and peaceful struggle for freedom led by the Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi, we have pursued these ideals and objectives during the last 50 years within the framework of social and communal harmony and broad tolerance in spite of insuperable obstacles. In January 1947, at his prayer meeting, after ending his historic fast, Gandhiji said “In this great country of ours there is room for all” and that “We must never, under any circumstances, treat any one as an enemy. We have all to live in harmony”. It is in accordance with this ancient motto of the Indian civilization, restated by Gandhiji at the time of his soul's agony, that independent India under Pandit Nehru had built up the secular foundations of our polity. On these

foundations rest our social and economic development, our democracy, our unity and coherence as a nation, and our position in the comity of nations. On this solemn occasion let us pay our homage to all those who had contributed to and sacrificed for this ideal, especially the common people of this land whose massive commonsense has withstood, by and large, all extremist ideological blandishments and emotional incitements, and helped us to keep to the golden middle path.

Indian democracy is the most precious product of this spirit of tolerance and this approach of secularism. During the last fifty years we have nourished the plant of democracy, with tender care and touching faith, and it has to-day fully flowered. Though this has elicited reluctant recognition from the democracies of the developed world, it must be noted that strategic considerations, even when they are misconceived, may be thicker than the spirit of democracy. What is important for us is that we preserve, protect, expand, and deepen democracy so that it covers meaningfully every section, every layer of our vast and complex society.

Already the panchayati raj experiment is extending democracy to the grass roots of our society. With decentralization and devolution of powers to the panchayats Indian democracy could involve the masses intimately in the building of a new and resurgent India. It could release new social and economic forces that

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could put substance and dynamism into our large developmental programmes. This is an occasion when we could take stock of our achievements in panchayati raj and find ways and means to inject greater democratic and developmental dynamism into its — functioning.

Though the women of India have a glorious record not only in looking after their families but in participating in public activities and in fighting for the freedom of the nation, they are today marginalized in our society and in politics. How can the nation progress when nearly 50% of the population is oppressed, ill-treated, discriminated against, denied basic human and civil rights? Instances of gender discrimination and atrocities against women ought to make our menfolk hang their heads in shame before the civilized world. Gandhi, Nehru, Subhas Chandra Bose, Sarojini Naidu, and indeed all our great leaders had stood up for the rights of our women. In this Golden Jubilee year of our independence let us not deny them their legitimate social, economic and political rights. Let us gracefully concede to them one-third reservation in Parliament and the Legislatures before they wrest it from our hands by their votes of wrath in the General Elections.

In our society of multiple deprivations and discriminations, the Scheduled Classes, the Scheduled Tribes and large sections of the Backward Classes are the most deprived, oppressed, and marginalized. Indeed, the acid test of any social reform or economic progress in India is whether it has made a positive difference to the lot of the members of these classes. Since Independence, largely due to the impulse of the Gandhian reform movement and the more militant movement launched by Babasaheb Ambedkar, every Government has pursued policies for the upliftment of these people. But progressive legislations enacted by the Governments are being negated at the level of implementation by forces in society that could only be described as counter-revolutionary. If we do not curb the reckless play of these reactionary forces who not only obstruct the implementation of reforms, but commit atrocities on the weaker sections with impunity, there is great danger of things going wrong with our democracy. The momentum of our progressive legislation must be sustained. The backlog of vacancies reserved for the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, especially in the higher rungs of government service, must be filled in.

Another section of our society, tender and beautiful, whom we all love, but neglect, ill-treat, and even

barbarously abuse, are our children. The social conscience of our people has to be aroused to ensure a fair deal for the children, and the State has to take a leading role in primary and secondary education so that children, especially of the weaker sections, are given education and thus prevented from working in hazardous occupations and becoming bonded child labour. This is not only a humanitarian task, but one that directly affects the health, education and the general social development of the nation.

One part of India to which special and focussed attention needs to be given, is the North-East. Despite being rich in natural resources, that part of the country has remained under-developed. Compounding this disability, is the factor of insurgent activities among a section of its people. This calls for the most urgent attention and action, so that the North East feels a secure participant in our national progress and part and parcel of our mainstream.

In the maintenance of democracy the example set by the legislators and the holders of public office is supremely important. Public office was regarded as a sacred space. Today it is regarded by an increasing number of wielders of it, as an opportunity to strike gold, and enjoy the loaves and fishes of power. It is a matter of the deepest regret that a great cynicism prevails in the public mind about politics and the administration. Floor crossings and cross-votings in power games are no longer rare transgressions of democratic norms. I cannot but recall the example, here, of Acharya Narendra Deva who, when he decided to leave the Congress, persuaded his colleagues in the U.P. Assembly to resign from their seats in the House.

Speaking here in this hall on the midnight of August 14-15, 1947, it is surprising that Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan referred to evils that have crept into administration and said: "Unless we destroy corruption in high places, root out every trace of nepotism, love of power, profiteering and blackmarketing which have spoiled the good name of this great country in recent times, we will not be able to raise the standards of efficiency in administration as well as in the production and distribution of the necessary goods of life." Unfortunately, those words are true today, if not truer.

I cannot but voice a pervasive sense of public concern over the frequent departure from order and decorum in parliamentary behaviour. Scenes of frayed tempers,

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often degenerating to violent acts in the well of the House, bring no credit to our democracy. Our people take democracy seriously. Let us not betray their faith in it — our most precious legacy.

In the field of industrialisation and economic and scientific-technological development India has made substantial, even spectacular progress. Our Green Revolution and White Revolution have given us self-sufficiency in foodgrains and milk production. But we have still to bring about a nutrition revolution capable of giving our people, especially the young people and expectant mothers, a nutritional diet. This lacuna has to be filled. And literacy, education, and health standards of our country have to be raised not only for securing a higher place in the world human development index but in providing the basic conditions and the motive force to any significant economic growth.

India today is a significant industrial and economic power of the world. And all estimates are that early in the 21st century, she would be one of the major world economic powers. Thanks to the liberalisation of and the opening up of the economy to the world that we have launched since 1992 and which we have been prosecuting with vigour as well as a measure of reasonable caution, India with its nearly 300 million strong middle class seething with the entrepreneurial spirit, and one of the largest markets in the world, has become a very attractive place for foreign investment.

On this occasion I should like to greet Indian citizens and people of Indian origin all over the world and invite them to invest in India with national pride and confidence that their investments would be safe, productive and lucrative in the land of their origin.

In science and technology, thanks to the vision of Jawaharlal Nehru and our scientists from Homi Bhabha and Vikram Sarabhai onwards, we have made great leaps forward. To-day Indian science has been crowned with important successes. These are for the welfare and safety of our people and of our nation. We are as intensely interested in peace and in a world without arms, as we have always been, and we have declared our willingness to join any international arrangements

and agreements that are non-discriminatory to rid the world of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction.

We have conducted nuclear tests recently not with the intention of using it against anyone. In fact I believe that atomic bombs are useful only when they are not used. They can only be a deterrent in the hands of a nation. Despite the prognosis by some of a nuclear conflict between India and Pakistan, I think, now that both countries have these weapons, it would drive home to both, the inescapable need to settle the differences between them peacefully and through negotiations. In the Shimla Agreement of 1972 India and Pakistan had solemnly declared to put an end to the conflict and confrontation between them and to resolve all differences through bilateral and peaceful means. Nuclear weapons have now made it compulsory for us to do so.

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru in his famous broadcast of September 7, 1946 had sent out the greetings of the newly emerging independent India to the world. He sent his greetings and good wishes to the United Kingdom, to United States of America, to the then Soviet Union, to the nations and peoples of Asia, to our neighbours and to China which he called "that mighty country with a mighty past". Today on this solemn occasion I should like to renew those greetings and expressions of friendship to our neighbours in South Asia and Asia. Pandit Nehru had pledged then to work for a one world, a world in which there was free co-operation of free peoples, and where no class or group exploits another. Today on behalf of the people of India I renew that pledge.

May I conclude by offering to the martyrs of our freedom struggle and to the great leaders and foot-soldiers of our freedom struggle, my homage. I also offer my greetings to our valiant defence and paramilitary forces. It is their vigil that safeguards our unity and sovereignty.

Let us, on this landmark occasion, re-dedicate ourselves to India's greatness.

Jai Hind

Prime Minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee's Address to the Nation from the ramparts of the Red Fort on the 51st Independence Day, August 15, 1998

“My dear Sisters, Brothers and Children:

I greet all of you on the occasion of the 51st Anniversary of our country's Independence. Half a Century has passed still it appears as if it happened yesterday. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru had unfurled our beloved tricolour from this very spot for the first time. Since then it has been a tradition to unfurl the National flag from the historic Red Fort. I had never imagined that I shall have this good fortune one day. It is a symbol of strength and potential of the Indian democracy that the son of a school teacher hailing from the dusty and smoky environs of a village has the privilege of unfurling the National tricolour from the ramparts of Red Fort on this auspicious Independence Day.

We all know that independence did not come to us easily. On the one hand, while tens of thousands of our countrymen and women suffered in jails during the non-violent freedom struggle under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, on the other hand, thousands of revolutionaries sacrificed their lives on the gallows. We owe our independence to these known and unknown martyrs and freedom fighters. Let all of us together pay homage to them and take a pledge that we shall defend our freedom, even if we have to sacrifice everything for this.

Our country has been subjected to foreign aggressions. In this short period of 50 years, we had to face four aggressions. But we have safeguarded our independence and integrity. The highest credit for this undoubtedly, goes to our soldiers. Away from their homes and dear ones, braving dangers all the time, they guard our frontiers day and night. This is why we are always reassured about our security. Be it the snowy expanse of Siachen with minus 32 degree Celsius temperature Or the thick forests of the North-East, the deserts of Kutch or Jaisalmer or the deep waters of the Indian Ocean — our troops are vigilant everywhere. On our behalf I greet all these troops of the Army, the Air Force and the Navy and other security personnel. While congratulating them we must say — “O! Brave Soldiers, we are proud of you!”.

The Forces need our support. Our farmers and labour force have strengthened the second line of defence in the farms, the barns and the factories. We can never forget this. Lal Bahadur Shastri had said: ‘Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan’— One is incomplete without the other, unfulfilled without the other. I have added a new aspect to this — Jai Vigyan! We can neither develop nor defend the country in the Twenty-first Century with the resources of the past Century. We have to modernise our forces to enable them to face any danger and safeguard our independence and integrity.

With only this aim, we conducted the nuclear tests on the 11th and 13th of May this year. The tests in Pokhran were not the efforts of just one night. They were the results of years of hard work on the part of our scientists, engineers, technicians and the defence forces. I have only tried to further the work the foundation of which was laid by Smt. Indira Gandhi. I was only a means. The credit for this great achievement goes to our talented scientists and the hard work of our defence forces. I wish to heartily congratulate all of them on this auspicious occasion of this Independence Day.

I am even grateful to all of you for extending your full support in this trying hour. With a few exceptions every Indian, wherever he may be living, has welcomed this step. Holding our head high That Day we proudly proclaimed “we are Indians”. For That Day in Pokhran, the might of the Nation manifested itself along with nuclear energy. I wish to make it clear right now that India has always been an ardent advocate of peace and will always remain so. We know and want to use weapons for self defence only. We would never use atomic weapons for attaching anyone. Hence, we have put a self moratorium on any new nuclear tests. We ourselves proclaimed to the world that we shall never be the first user of atomic weapons. We are doing it neither under pressure nor fear of any one. We are doing it voluntarily because of our firm belief in world peace and disarmament. Our dream is to see the world free from nuclear weapons and we want to see this dream come true. Initially, some countries did not appreciate our national security policy needs and doubted our intention. Some of them imposed economic sanctions against us. But now the situation is changing. The world is gradually appreciating the Indian view point. We have been able to make them understand our position. As a result, some of the sanctions have begun ease. We welcome this changing global attitude. However, we also want to make one point clear. India is a great country and its people are powerful.

The brave people of our country are always ready to face any danger to defend their honour. Our history bears testimony to this. No force on earth can deflect us from our chosen path. I am saying this nor out of arrogance but with humility and self-confidence. We are willing to make any sacrifice to uphold the unity, integrity and sovereignty of our country.

We wish to improve relations with our neighbours. We know that the easiest way to win a war is not to let it happen.

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We are ready to hold talks with Pakistan on any subject, at any level and at anytime.

You all know that I had taken the initiative during the SAARC Conference in Colombo. I am somewhat unhappy that we did not get the desired response. Still I have not given up. I will make another effort at reviving the dialogue during the Conference of the Non-Aligned countries in South Africa at the end of this month.

I believe that all problems of the world can be solved through talks. Therefore, whether it is Pakistan or China, we will endeavour to solve our mutual problems through friendly talks.

In the last few days, terrorist activities have increased in Jammu & Kashmir. The massacre in Himachal Pradesh appears to be part of a bigger conspiracy. Such terrorist activities every day, from across the border, are like a proxy war. Government has taken these incidents very seriously. We are facing them with all our might and we will not rest content until we have defeated these.

Whether in personal or national life, the fifty first anniversary is always a golden opportunity to assess the past fifty years. It is also the time for retrospection and preparation for a leap into the Twenty-first Century. While making an assessment we most often commit mistakes, tend to underrate our achievements and magnify our shortcomings which results in gloom.

Sometimes, I see a growing tendency of pessimism in the country. There may have been aberrations here and there but things have not gone that bad so as to defy solutions. Our scriptures say that only fools indulge in self-praise. But unnecessary self-condemnation is also like suicide. I want that a realistic assessment of the last fifty years should be undertaken. When we attained Independence, some Western experts had forecast that we were unfit for being a democracy and did not deserve freedom. They said, we would soon disintegrate. But, today, we can say with pride that we have not only safeguarded our integrity and independence but have also shown to the world how the biggest democracy can be governed.

Almost all the countries which gained freedom along with us have fallen prey to dictatorship or military at one time or the other, but we have kept the democratic tradition alive. This is our Twelfth Lok Sabha and I am the Eleventh Prime Minister of India. We have seen over the years transformations taking place from the tiniest village assembly to the Parliament. You all deserve credit for this. Your political maturity in all these elections have baffled political Pundits. I congratulate you for this.

Our democracy is safe as long as you remain vigilant. On the occasion of the Golden Jubilee celebrations of our Independence, the Nation has to address itself to the important fact that Independence, National Integration, Democracy and Secularism are complementary to each other. We have to

remain independent under all circumstances. An essential condition for this is national unity. Democracy is necessary for national unity. Democracy is necessary for national unity. Secularism and democracy are inseparable parts of national unity.

I and my Government are committed to all these four elements. We oppose communalism in any form. We will ensure full security of the minorities and guarantee their participation in development. We should never forget that we are the citizens of one country. The boundaries of this country extends from Ladakh to Nicobar, from Garo Hills to Gilgit. Ours is a country whose civilization and culture is more than five thousand years old. Such a big country replete with varieties of language, faith, living and food habits has resolved to achieve social and economic justice within the framework of democracy.

Simultaneously, we cannot forget that we have to strive to rid this democracy of aberrations. Our legislators behave in such a way in Legislatures that even a school teacher would not tolerate such kind of behaviour in his class. Democracy is a system of Governance through free debate. The Opposition has the right to criticise and Government has the right to implement. The Opposition and the Government are complementary to each other and adversaries. Fearless and impartial voting has to be further strengthened. The electoral system has to be reformed to free it from casteism, violence, money power and other ills so that in the next century our system of governance is further refined. Once upon a time this country was a land of prosperity. The situation deteriorated and we began to be counted among the poor nations of the world. In the past few years our farmers and agricultural workers have worked very hard to make the country self-sufficient in foodgrain production. An army with an empty stomach cannot fight and a hungry Nation cannot have a restful sleep. Our farmers have made the country self-sufficient to justify their being called "Food Providers". I can only pray to God that He showers happiness on the "Food Providers".

There is a shadow of sorrow in this happiness. Today the condition of our "Food Providers" has become difficult. I feel very pained that this year in some States some farmers have had to commit suicide because they could not bear the burden of their debts. I offer my condolences to the bereaved families. As a tribute to these farmers I have taken a decision. The Crop Insurance scheme will be broadened, new crops will be brought within its purview and its geographical reach will be increased. A High-powered Commission will be formed to look into the real financial condition of farmers. improve their economic condition. I want to assure our farmer brothers who are the backbones of the Nation that they will never suffer under this Government.

In Orissa, hunger still stalks the people in places like — Bolangir, Kalahandi and Koraput. It is unimaginable that

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even 50 years after Independence some people are still stalked by hunger. I have told the Planning Commission that the outlay on the Employment Assurance Scheme in these areas should be doubled. My efforts will be to ensure that no one dies of hunger. The country has made commendable progress in business, industry and services. Some of our industries are making their mark on the international scene. I congratulate all the workers, employees, managers, industrialists and businessmen for this achievement.

But we know that this achievement is only a stepping stone. It is not the attainment of the final goal which is to see the rise of India as an economic superpower. I know that saying this is much easier than doing it. For this, We will need to follow the path of hard work, establish high standards and depend on self-reliance. We will have to produce goods of international standard which can compete in the global markets. Economic reforms will have to be speeded up. But we will not allow others to take undue advantage of our liberalisation. We will implement infrastructure projects with speed.

'Swadeshi' does not mean an inward looking policy. The world has become a global village. Each one is dependent on the other. In this open market system we can use our inner strength to stand up to global competition and I have faith that we will!

This 51st Independence Day is being celebrated not only in India but also round the world. Every person of Indian origin in every country is celebrating this sacred occasion with joy and enthusiasm. I give my good wishes to every person of Indian origin round the globe on this occasion. In some countries our brothers and sisters are watching it live on television.

Non-Resident Indians have brought strength to the economies of the nations where they have settled. Now they have an opportunity to strengthen India's economy. We have floated the Resurgent India Bond. Non-Resident Indians around the world are taking benefit of this opportunity. So far, the scheme has brought in Rs.5, 000 crore. I am confident that Non-Resident Indians will take further advantage of this scheme.

We will have to solve these problems. I know that all of you, especially our sisters, are feeling the pinch of the rising prices of some commodities. I understand your problem. Nature is to be blamed more for this than the Government. But I know that by saying this your burden will not be lightened. The Finance Ministry and the State Governments will work together to combat the Price rise. I also ask for the cooperation of traders. They should not indulge in hoarding or profit-making. We will not hesitate in taking strong measures against such elements. I know that a number of festivals are coming up in the next few days. My effort will be to see that rising prices do not dampen your festive spirit.

The country faces another problem that of corruption which is eating into the vitals of the country like cancer. We have

decided to fight it. We have begun the fight from the top. I have not even left out the Prime Minister from the ambit of the Lok Pal Bill which was recently introduced in the Lok Sabha. This has made clear our intentions to fight corruption at the highest level.

Along with this, we wish to fight corruption in the bureaucracy. Very soon, I will initiate action to speed up work in the cell in the Prime Minister's Office which is looking into corruption cases against officials. Removal of unemployment is an important pledge in our National Agenda. It is affecting the lives of everyone. Employment is the only way of fulfilling the basic needs of the people. Creation of schemes for total employment is difficult, but not impossible. But there will be a need to change the planning process. The basic needs and services will have to be produced by the masses. Science and technology will have to be applied for this.

Government has decided that ten crore people should get employment opportunities over the next ten years. This means that every year one crore people should get employment opportunities. A Task Force will be set up for this purpose and it will present its report soon.

The status of women is a good indicator to judge the progress of a modern society. We had promised to give women 33% reservation in Parliament and the Assemblies. We are sorry that we have not been able to fulfill this so far. We have already decided to provide free education to girls up to Graduation levels. Now we are going to take another major initiative. All girls at the primary level will be provided books in their curriculum free of cost. This will cost Rs. 550 crore to the Government. A new Insurance Scheme, 'Rajrajeshwari' will be started to provide women economic security. Another Insurance scheme, 'Bhagyashree' will be started for girls. Both schemes will begin on Diwali Day this year. The premium for the scheme will be Re.1 per month. and the policy holder will be able to get Rs.25, 000 in case of emergency. The full details will be announced soon.

Reservation in jobs has already been provided to the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes. However, implementation of these provisions is very slow. My Government's efforts will be to speed up the implementation process and to fill the reservation quotas as quickly as possible. The administration will be made more sensitive and accountable to these classes.

Youth power is the strength of the nation. It is also the future of the nation. Many years ago I had read the words of Baba Amte "Haath lage nirman mey, nahin mangne, marne." (Use your hands to create, not to ask or hit). This is also our wish. The young girls and boys of India do not have to extend their hands before anyone, nor do they have to use their hands against anyone. They should only dedicate themselves to the task of national reconstruction. For this purpose, we have decided to form the National Reconstruction

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Force (Rashtriya Punarnirman Vahini) which will involve youth from 18-35 years of age.

This force will focus on basic services in the rural and agricultural sectors, protection of environment, mass movement for population control, fight against drugs, spread of education, uplift of Dalit and tribal women and in the field of sports, art and culture. These youth will also get honorarium for their work. Initially this scheme will be implemented in some districts and finally extended all over the country.

This scheme will be launched on the 12th January, which is the Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekanand and which is celebrated as the Youth Day. I call upon the young men and women of this country to donate one year of their youth to rejuvenate the Nation.

The next millennium is beckoning us. It will be century of Information Technology. The greatest strength of India is its intellect. India has the third largest trained manpower in the field of Science and Technology. We will have to tap this strength. My Government has taken several new initiatives in the field of Information and Technology. It is our ambition that the country should become a super power in this field.

Keeping this in view I am announcing a new initiative. Space is a new challenging area which has provided the human race an opportunity to look for innumerable possibilities in the coming century. Space technology has many advantages which India can utilise to meet the aspirations of its younger generation. On the basis of the slogan 'Jai Vigyan', my Government wants to fulfil the dreams of our youth. In this direction we will start programmes on a new satellite named Swaran Jayanti Vidya Vikas Antariksh Upagraha Yojana (Golden Jubilee Education Development Space Satellite Scheme).

The first satellite of this programme INSAT 3-B will be assembled and launched before the 15th August, 1999 by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) within a record time of less than twelve months. Six transponders of this satellite will be available exclusively to execute 'Operation Knowledge' which aims to provide computer, Internet and computer based education to all the students of the country. All Universities, engineering and medical colleges, research laboratories and other centres of higher learning particularly will be linked to the Information Technology network before the next Independence Day. This programme will also fulfil the development related information needs of the States.

Today 125th birth anniversary celebrations of Mahrishi Aurobindo are coming to a close. He visualized the spiritual, moral and cultural renaissance of the country. Today we should pledge to fulfil his dreams. Bharat Ratna Baba Saheb Ambedkar once said that political freedom is incomplete without economic and social freedom. Today, on our political Independence Day we cannot forget this moot point. In the half-century gone by, we have been able to keep intact

our political Independence but could not win the battle of economic and social independence. We have not been able to free the country from the clutches of poverty and unemployment. The stigma of illiteracy could not be erased. The monsters of casteism and communalism still are raising their ugly head. Today on India's 51st Independence Day, let us pledge to win economic and social independence.

In the short tenure of my Prime Ministership, I have made an effort to take everybody along and I have practised the politics of consensus. Take the example of Cauvery. There was dispute for years on sharing of Cauvery water among Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Pondicherry. On some occasions, this dispute took a serious turn. Water is used to extinguish fire but if water itself is on fire, what could be done. There is a solution. The solution lies in maturity, harmony, tolerance, patriotism and a willingness to keep others' interest in mind. The recently concluded Cauvery accord epitomises all this.

Is it not surprising that a large amount of water of our rivers flows away into the ocean, while we fight over our share of water? These disputes have been going on for years. This situation has to be changed. Our rivers which link the States of the country have to link the hearts of the countrymen too. There is a need to formulate a National Water Policy. We have promised to formulate such a policy. However, it is possible only with everybody's cooperation and patience.

My Government has been seriously endeavouring to fulfil the promises made in the National Agenda for Governance. Ours is a coalition and such Governments have their own character which has to be faithfully adhered to. We have prepared a common programme that is the National Agenda for our alliance. We have kept all contentious issues out of this arrangement. Whatever we have done till today has been in National interest. We have always held National interest to be above party and personal interest.

The country is passing through a transitional phase today. Our political and administrative system is facing a serious challenge. In such a situation every party and every leader has to conduct himself with a sense of responsibility. History will not forgive us for any action which hurts the Nation. The common man should also ponder over the existing political and administrative set up. We are faced with some basic issues. Are frequent elections in the interest of the country? Is it in the Nation's interest to incur heavy expenditures on frequent elections? I have been Prime Minister only for five months. We have a very thin majority in the Lok Sabha. I am aware of the limitations of the coalition Government. I am also aware that in today's system an innocent sage can be hanged by the power hungry.

I can assure you that I have never compromised on principles in pursuit of power and I will never do it. Being in power or out of power is the same for me. I had been in opposition for forty years and faithfully performed my duties.

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My opponents have also commended it. Today, a poem of Dr. Shiv Mangal Singh Suman comes to mind —

'Kya har main kya jeet main, Kinchit nahin Bhaybhit main, Kartavya path par jo milen, Yeh bhi sahi, wah bhi sahi, Vardan mangoonga nahin' (I am not afraid of victory or defeat; whatever come my way on the path of duty, I will accept it as it is and would not ask for any favours).

Friends, I wish to assure you that till my last breath I will neither ask for favours nor give up the path of struggle. I only need your support. I only need the blessings of one billion of my countrymen. There comes a moment in life when one stands at crossroads and ponders over the path to take.

'Chauraha par lut-ta cheer, Pyade se pit gaya wajir, Chalun

akhiri chaal ki bazi chhor virakti rachaun main, Rah kaunsi jaun main' (Modesty is being enraged openly and Pawn has beaten the Queen, should I take one last gambit or leave it all — which path do I take?).

Then I feel that I cannot go into oblivion leaving the challenges behind. I have to struggle. Once again, I reiterate my pledge in your presence from the ramparts of Red Fort.

'Haar nahin Manoonga, Raar nayee thanoonga, Kal ke kapal par likhta, mita-ta hoon, Geet naya gata hoon'

(I will not accept defeat and will start the struggle afresh. I will write and unwrite my own destiny and sing a new tune).

Thank you very much. Join me in saying, **JAI HIND JAI HIND JAI HIND**'

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