

**ADDRESS TO THE NATION BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, H.E. SMT.  
PRATIBHA DEVISINGH PATIL ON THE EVE OF THE 62<sup>ND</sup> INDEPENDENCE  
DAY ON AUGUST 14, 2008**

Dear Fellow Citizens,

On the eve of our 62<sup>nd</sup> Independence Day, I extend my warmest greetings to all of you, living in India and abroad. I also extend a special word of gratitude to the brave personnel of the Armed Forces and Para-military forces who guard our frontiers.

Tomorrow, as we celebrate our freedom, we will pay homage to our great national leaders, valiant freedom fighters - both men and women - who made many sacrifices, including of their lives to liberate India from colonial rule. Tomorrow is an occasion to recall that under the inspiring leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, our freedom struggle was fought and won on the noble principles of truth and non-violence, making it a unique movement in the history of nations. As inheritors of such a great legacy, we must uphold these high values.

At the time of independence, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru spoke about India as a rising star, the star of freedom in the East. He reminded us that freedom would bring responsibilities and burdens, and that we must face them in the spirit of a free and disciplined people. Due to our efforts and perseverance, we have many achievements to our credit but there are several tasks that await completion and new challenges that need to be addressed. A nation's work never ends. In fact, we must work ceaselessly to advance our common destiny of a strong democratic India that is economically vibrant and modern, but yet rooted in its age old values of harmony, tolerance and mutual respect. One should never forget that these are the values that make us emotionally strong and hold our country together. We may still have a long way to go to eradicate poverty, disease and illiteracy but other countries in the world respect India because of these values.

It is when we work unitedly that we will realize our full strength and potential. India is a conglomeration of a diversity of cultures, languages and religions but running through this is a unity which has given to us resilience and strength. I am confident that the concept of India that is functioning in unison in a milieu of a vast diversity will continue to define our identity.

We should pause and reflect on how our conduct and our actions are promoting unity. We must ask ourselves whether our actions are contributing to the strengthening of the national fabric and bringing about tolerant thinking. We should demonstrate our ability to listen to each other, to understand each other and if perceptions do not agree, give to the others the freedom to hold their views.

Our Constitution provides the nation strong pillars of stability. It gives to citizens their fundamental rights and freedoms but also lays down fundamental duties. Often, we are vocal about our rights but we tend to focus less on our numerous duties. We have duties towards the country, society and family, of which we can ignore none. We must remember that while discharging our duties, we have an obligation to act responsibly.

Great nations are built with the contributions and hard work of one and all. On the other hand, violence in any form undermines its progress. There have been instances in our country of people taking law into their own hands and causing destruction to life and public property. Whatever the problem, whatever the cause, whatever the reason, there is no place for violence in our society. There is no issue that does not lend itself to dialogue and reconciliation. The paths of peace and compromise can be complex and difficult, but pursue them we must. They alone will enable the nation to grow and prosper. I appeal that calm be always maintained in all parts of the country and wherever differences exist, all efforts be directed towards reconciliation.

Dear Citizens,

I have no doubt that India will progress, our national wealth will increase and the economic and social conditions of our people will improve. No one should be left behind as the nation progresses. It is my wish that growth and prosperity reaches every state, every district, every city, every town, every village and every individual of the country. We have attained impressive rates of growth but empowerment of all sections of society still remains unaccomplished. Addressing the needs of the under-privileged, the disadvantaged sections and other weaker sections of our society will make our growth process more stable and equitable. Gandhiji gave us an unfailing criteria and a sure test for determining the soundness of our actions. He said that when in doubt, recall the face of the poorest and the weakest person whom you have seen and ask if the step you are contemplating is going to be of any

use to him. These words, I believe, lay down the basic principle of our social responsibility. Government has formulated flagship programmes for improving the lives of the people. Those involved in the implementation of development and social welfare schemes must work with dedication and zeal, and without causing delays. Implementation done in a transparent and accountable manner will ensure that welfare schemes reach the genuine beneficiaries in a timely manner. Thus, preventing corruption in our system and enhancing efficiency in governance.

To improve the economic status and empowerment of women, there is no better route than that of cooperatives and Self Help Groups. In a sporadic manner credit, production and marketing support is being extended to women. These initiatives need to be linked, integrated and strengthened to generate a nationwide movement for the empowerment of women. I strongly feel that women must be provided better avenues of growth, opportunities for participation and support to overcome the prejudices against them. This is their right and women must strive hard to get their rights. Real development cannot take root if it bypasses women, who represent the very pivot around which social change takes shape.

Social evils that exist in our society have distracted us from building a progressive nation. Social malpractices have caused agony in families, disruption in society and resulted in squandering of economic resources. Whether it is dowry, discrimination against the girl child, female foeticide, domestic violence, addiction to tobacco, drugs and alcohol – all of them must be eradicated from our society. Just to take an example, consumption of tobacco in India, causes about 8 lakh deaths per year and major health problems. According to a recent study, the personal and social costs of tobacco related cancer, heart and lung diseases were estimated to be around Rs. 30,800 crore about six years ago and is increasing. If the fallout of other addictions is included, the figure would be higher. Besides, these addictions reduce productivity levels, which results in lower income levels for an individual and economic loss to the nation. We must look at a nationwide addiction focused eradication programme. Eliminating addiction and fighting social evils can be a slow process as it involves changing attitudes. This requires sustained effort. As the wise men tell us - water dropping continuously will, over a period of time, make even the rock hollow. Similarly, a band of committed institutions and selfless workers with their persistent social work can create awareness and, slowly but surely, change old practices. People and organizations who work tirelessly without expectation of rewards, unseen and maybe unsung, constitute the

foundation of a nation and give it inherent strength. Rabindranath Tagore rightly said, and I quote, "The roots below the earth claim no rewards for making the branches fruitful". Unquote.

The growth and the reach of the media has been extensive in recent times. It can play an important role in the eradication of social evils by bringing about social awareness and educating the public. Television has penetrated into almost every home and it exercises a powerful influence in shaping opinions and attitudes, particularly of the youth. It can guide the youth by its high standards of professionalism and journalistic ethics while portraying events relating to children and the youth. The media has the capacity to generate hope and promote values, a role it must play.

Fellow Citizens,

India has a population of 540 million young people. The youth of our country are in search of a bright future and seek to build a new India. The young population with its aspirations provides an opportunity for India for attaining higher productivity levels. For this, we must focus on ensuring good education for our children, imparting to them values and building the skills of our youth for creating a productive work force.

I have always advocated that special attention be given to the development of agriculture and rural areas. Seventy percent of our population lives in villages and is dependent on agriculture. Therefore, the development of India will not be comprehensive or complete unless there is development in the rural areas and increased agricultural productivity. We must not forget that the food security of India is dependent on the growth of its agriculture. We should aim at enhancing productivity by using better technology and innovative farming practices, with the active participation of the Panchayats. At the same time, our scientists and agricultural research institutes must work to usher in a second Green Revolution which, along with agro-biotechnology, can translate into an ever-Green Revolution in India.

Science and technology holds the key to progress in today's knowledge based societies. Productivity of capital, labour and resources are dependent on the technology used. India is currently focused on expanding its physical infrastructure, enhancing its

industrial and agricultural productivity. Our scientists and researchers should find efficient and cost-effective options for growth.

As a developing country our demands for energy are growing. We cannot let lack of energy become a constraint on our ability to deliver high levels of growth. With the challenges of increased oil prices and climate change, the question of energy security confronts us. We need to look at energy mixes that are sustainable in the long run and are cleaner sources of energy, gradually making a deliberate shift to renewable energy. It should be our national mission to begin exploring ways in which new sources of energy can be harnessed viably. Technologies that increase efficiency in energy-intensive sectors need to be developed. Similarly, patterns of consumption, based on conservation and efficient use that save energy and reduce levels of emissions need to be adopted. Any contribution to save energy is a step towards environment protection and in saving the wide diversity of flora and fauna on the planet.

Terrorism has emerged as a global problem, posing a threat to national as well as international peace and security. The ideologues of terrorism have little respect for human life. They incite violence and mindless destruction. Unfortunately, terrorist groups continue to receive support and sanctuary. India has been the target of terrorist attacks for several decades, and, in more recent times so have many countries across the globe. We must stand united against the threats emanating from terrorism. Terrorists, with their disruptive agenda, will never succeed in discouraging us from our resolve to build a strong India, or from working with our neighbours to eliminate this menace from our region, or from our commitment to forge co-operative relations with other countries across the world.

India seeks to engage with the international community to promote peace and development in the world. As the world's largest democracy and a major economy, our role in global political and economic affairs has been responsible and positive. It is our view that multilateral institutions should be made more equitable and reflect contemporary realities. On our part, we will continue to carry into the global arena the message of harmony, pluralism, peaceful co-existence and oneness of the human race, concepts which are deeply rooted in our national ethos.

Fellow Citizens,

I speak to you as the Olympic Games are underway in Beijing. I convey my good wishes to our contingent. I would like to especially congratulate Shri Abhinav Bindra for his historic achievement of winning India's first ever individual Gold Medal.

The tricolor will fly tomorrow morning, a sense of pride will fill our hearts; let us pledge to perform our duties towards our great nation with dedication, hard work and sincerity. I conclude with the following lines:-

परिश्रम से खुलते द्वार प्रगति के,  
लगन से मिलती कामयाबी  
शांत मन रोकें हिंसा,  
प्रबुद्ध जन करें मानव सेवा।

*Which means:-*

Hard work opens the doors of progress,  
Dedication brings success.  
Tranquil minds shun violence,  
Enlightened people work for humanity.

Once again I convey my greetings for Independence Day.

Jai Hind.