

**Address to the Nation by President of India on the eve of
Independence Day
14th August 2007**

My Dear Fellow Citizens,

On the eve of the momentous occasion of the 60th anniversary of our Independence Day, I extend my warmest greetings to my fellow-citizens in India and the world over. This is also the 150th year of our historic War of Independence in 1857.

The saga of our Independence involved the sacrificial struggle of many freedom fighters – some whose names are etched in history as stalwarts and the countless, relatively less-known souls - whose silent contribution conjointly helped to realize the dream of an Independent India under the charismatic leadership of the Father of our Nation, Mahatma Gandhi. Let us solemnly remember them with gratitude and reverence and pay homage to their sacrifice for the liberation of our motherland from the colonial yoke.

I am happy that the two events are being celebrated in a befitting manner to inspire our younger generation, remind them about glorious past and inculcate in them a spirit of sacrifice, dedication and patriotism.

Having traversed sixty long years since independence, it is time for us to introspect on the progress achieved so far and ponder over the future course of action. We have excelled in many areas; and in many others we still have immense scope for improvement.

Democracy in India has taken deep roots. But it cannot be appreciated in its fullest glory if we construe it merely as a political

arrangement. The real test lies in internalizing the spirit of democracy and making it a habit of our minds. We have ably demonstrated to the world, how India – a developing nation of more than a billion people – can give its people a better quality of life within the framework of a secular democracy. It is the greatness of the people of India that amidst all trials and tribulations, they have kept the sacred flame of democracy burn ever-bright illuminating India's journey in the new millennium. As members of the largest thriving democracy in the world, it continues to be the bounden duty of every citizen to ensure that the system of parliamentary democracy which we have worked successfully grows from strength to strength.

What is of still greater significance is that the framework of democratic governance and the reach of representative institutions have percolated down to the common man. The wisdom of the Founding Fathers of our constitution has been vindicated in that the process of democratic decentralization has acquired healthy roots intimately encompassing village panchayats and urban local bodies. Our endeavour should be to stamp out the imperfections and entrench democratic decentralization to ensure participative decision-making of the people in the planning process at the grass-root level to build a more vibrant India. Along with such decentralization it is equally important to provide a morally superior and clean administration. This would empower every citizen, especially the poor, the disadvantaged and the marginalized to enjoy the real fruits of democracy.

The father of the nation, Mahatma Gandhi once said, "Salvation of India lies in the elevation of her women." It is indeed

encouraging that assured representation has been provided to nearly one million women in our local bodies. History bears sufficient proof that our womenfolk have excelled themselves not only as able homemakers but in devoting themselves to the noble task of nation building. Let us resolve that they are not left marginalized in our society. Let us also resolve to expand opportunities for their wholesome participation in every field of activity and make them harbingers of sustainable development.

Fostering equilibrium in diversity is the hallmark of democracy. What sets our nation apart is that in spite of criss-crossing of a plethora of culture, languages, religions, customs, faith and traditions, our people are bound together in unison by a deep-rooted secular Indian identity. Evolution through synthesis and inherent respect for pluralism has been the golden thread which has run through our millennia old civilization. Non-violence, tolerance, acceptance of all religions and different ways of life, search for truth and fearlessness are cherished values that have become the cornerstone of our heritage. We must recapture the spirit of unity that marked our freedom struggle, linking the people of all parts of our country in a common endeavour of ultimate loyalty to the nation.

We have to weld the entire nation into a strong, unassailable unity in which there is no room for distrust between man and man. For any nation and its people to become great, there is a need to pursue the path of collective vision. The more developed amongst us should inspire and enthuse the less developed to race ahead on the road to development. We must strive to maximize our collective performance so as to build a nation of equal opportunities. Today,

we are, where we are, entirely due to the collective participation of our people and our endeavour should be towards fostering an environment of cooperative federalism and collective pursuit of national goals.

Working within the canons of parliamentary democracy and through the mechanism of planned economic development, we have made commendable economic progress. India's stature as an economic entity has gone up manifold. We are fortunate to live in the times of a buoyant and upswing economy. Steady industrial growth, growing exports and sound foreign exchange reserves are all signs of growing economic strength and resilience. A surplus current account and sizeable capital inflows are other indicators of the strong fundamentals of our country's economy. World over, there is a growing realization that India's business environment is changing. We are being watched with singular interest and both developed and developing countries have shown great eagerness to forge economic partnerships with us. If we draw up a balance sheet, listing our strengths and weaknesses, we would perhaps find more pluses than minuses. Nevertheless, we have to take special care to bring in egalitarian reforms to ensure that the full benefit of economic liberalization reaches people at all levels.

Growth, when unevenly spread, dwarfs overall prosperity. Only through socially inclusive growth can there be sustained consistency in our growth rates. We have to ensure equitable growth for all. The fruits of economic development must necessarily touch, especially, the living and working conditions of our toiling masses and people below the poverty line. It should be remembered that our freedom fighters toiled not only for political freedom but dreamt of

transforming political freedom into a vehicle for attaining the goal of equality and prosperity for all. As Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru said “Democracy means equality, and democracy can only flourish in an equal society.” Empowerment of our economically deprived section of the society still remains unaccomplished. Progress must relate to the lives of the people and we have to conscientiously discharge our responsibilities towards uplifting the socially and economically disadvantaged and weaker sections of the society. For this let us resolve to rededicate ourselves to rid the country of poverty and build a strong and resurgent India.

Agriculture has a critical role to play for balanced development and especially a better life for our farmers. Apart from overall contribution to the national income and helping in the attainment of the goal of food security for all, a strong and robust growth in agriculture can help reduce rural poverty. A vibrant agriculture sector will create a dynamic rural economy which will further drive our economic growth. The success of the First green Revolution has been significant and helped us to feed a population, which has crossed the one billion mark and I express our nation’s gratitude to our farmers, labourers and congratulate our scientists who are responsible for this glorious accomplishment. However we cannot remain complacent, we need to sustain the momentum of the first revolution and must analyze the challenges that we face in the present agricultural scenario. Recently I had the occasion to interact with the top agricultural scientists in a seminar that discussed the issues related to eradication of hunger and poverty vis-a-vis agricultural development. I am confident that the synergized endeavour of our policy makers, the farming community, farmers

organizations, voluntary agencies and agricultural scientists and agribusiness enterprises can help us meet the challenges that beset the agricultural front and tackle distressful situation faced by farmers in some pockets of the country. In the coming years we need to ensure that agriculture becomes more rewarding with formulation of appropriate policies, measures and technologies.

This year as in previous years, we have seen floods in some parts of the country resulting in loss of lives and damage to property. My heartfelt sympathies to the people in the flood ravaged areas of the country. The seriousness of the matter makes it imperative to take necessary steps to prevent this recurring phenomenon.

There is a new climate of growth and competitiveness in our industrial economy. A youthful India is taking its place on the world-stage surely and steadily. The world is on the threshold of a new wave, where the ability to create knowledge and innovate has become the key competitive differentiator between nations. The strength of our knowledge capital is now recognized worldwide and we need to ensure a supportive environment for it. We are fast emerging as a major economic power of the world and our entrepreneurs are surging ahead with fresh self-confidence. The achievements in knowledge economy, IT and IT enabled services, pharmaceuticals and other sunrise industries have been spectacular. Our corporate have made bold and successful forays into the global market and corporate acquisitions. My good wishes go for our entrepreneurs, big and small, in their continuing enterprise. The contribution of the working classes has been considerable and the nation owes a deep debt of gratitude to them.

A significant feature of our changing society is the transformation taking place in the country's demographic profile. As

a people, we are growing younger. Youth in India constitute a sizeable, vibrant and resourceful segment of our society who are fired with the desire to scale greater heights. Children and youth are our hope for tomorrow. There can be no greater cause, no better investment, no greater priority for development consensus than bringing the needs, rights and expectations of the youth to the centre-stage of development concern. It is our duty to kindle the imagination of our youth so that the nation surges ahead with added strength and vigour.

This casts a greater responsibility on our educational institutions at all levels to harmonize the cognitive faculties of our youth in the direction of the continued well-being of our nation. While the prime concern of our educational institutions is and should be studies, it should not stagnate into a medium which merely facilitates mechanical acquisition of information. Knowledge imparted should have an organic and living relationship with the societal needs and help in mediating the strands of overwhelming challenges of a rapidly changing modern-day world. While we foster an atmosphere conducive to promoting higher standards of academic excellence, we should not overlook the need to nurture a system of holistic education that teaches positive values and makes good citizens.

It is also vital that we recognize the importance of health while planning our social infrastructure. Poor health shackles human capital. There is an imperative need to widen the coverage and qualitatively empower both the primary and secondary health care systems. Affordable health care has to reach the rural and urban

poor and be supplemented by other inter-sectoral interventions like provision of safe drinking water, better sanitation facilities, coordinated slums management, nutritional programmes and family welfare measures.

Fellow-citizens, we cannot forget that we live in a world and in a neighbourhood. We stand for friendship with all nations and will continue to work for international peace and security. We should also continue to intensify cooperation to fight the global challenges of terrorism, poverty, ignorance, disease and climate change.

This is the occasion to express our gratitude to the brave personnel of our Armed Forces whose eternal vigil and protection of our borders, seas and skies under challenging circumstances have ushered in a climate of peace enabling us to plan the path of future progress and development of the nation.

As we watch the tri-colour unfurl tomorrow morning, let us all hold our heads high with pride and confidence and look ahead with optimism towards a better and brighter future for our great nation.

Dear citizens, rarely there comes a moment in time such as this when we as a nation stand firm on the solid foundations painstakingly established by our ancestors, and with nationalistic pride in our hearts, look ahead to the glorious path of infinite possibilities that await India with open arms. Today India is poised to take flight into this open sky of success and perfection, and as loyal citizens of this country, it is our duty, as individuals, and as a nation to ensure that we do not let this unprecedented moment in time go unutilized for the dream of a strong, robust and prosperous India. It is a vision, a dream, a goal; as success must be the anthem of every nation's

awakening. For our nation to rise and claim its glorious destiny, we must realize that it is us, and our billion hands that can shape it, and in the immortal clarion call of Swami Vivekanada, I ask my fellow-citizens to "Arise, Awake and Stop not till the goal is reached."

JAI HIND !