

## President's speech on the eve of 64th Independence Day, 2010

*Address to the nation by the President of India Her Excellency Smt. Pratibha Devisingh Patil on the eve of the 64th Independence Day*

My Fellow Citizens,

On the eve of our 64th Independence Day, I extend my warmest greetings to all of you from all walks of life, living in India and overseas. I convey special greetings to the brave personnel of our Armed Forces and the Para-military forces who guard our frontiers and to our Central and State police, as well as our internal security forces. I also compliment every citizen of this country whose hard work, productive prowess and enterprising zeal have put India among the front ranks of the nations of the world. I convey my heartfelt condolences to all those who have lost their loved ones, suffered injuries and whose properties have been destroyed in the recent cloud burst in Leh.

Dear Citizens,

Every year, we celebrate our Independence Day with great fervour as well as joy and justifiably so, as it commemorates that day, when after many years of subjugation, our country gained its freedom. Indeed, in the annals of history, 15th of August 1947 will always be remembered as a day of an extraordinary accomplishment, of when India won its freedom with unparalleled fortitude and unique means. Under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, our movement for attaining freedom through Ahimsa and Satyagraha spread throughout the country, inspiring people in a manner rarely seen. Millions and millions of our men and women, willingly and enthusiastically responded to his call. They united to become an immense force that defeated the mightiest colonial power. Free India, was thus born.

As citizens of free India, we must reflect on the values and principles which were in the minds and hearts of those who fought and sacrificed for our freedom. They drew inspiration from the values nurtured in the country through millennia. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru once described Gandhiji as, "embodying the old spirit of India, who held aloft the torch of freedom". Gandhiji's thoughts and his life were truly an expression of the philosophy of our ancient civilization in which peace and harmony, non-violence and truth, human dignity and compassion were given great prominence. Are we now forgetting these principles? Are we overlooking them? No, we should not. These are eternal values, which have sustained our nation, our society and also each one of us as individuals. Gandhiji's thinking continues to have deep influence and is of increasing relevance in the world, with 2nd October, his birthday, being observed every year as the International Day of Non-Violence.

Dear Citizens,

We are at a historic phase when the world is shifting course. It is impacting our economy, polity, trade, commerce, education and pace of life. In this era of transformation, India definitely cannot lag behind. Our entire effort must be to ensure that there is overall development in which all people prosper. However, can our political approaches, economic progress and scientific advances be combined with values of human welfare, tolerance, mutual respect and selflessness propounded by learned men, leaders, philosophers and thinkers of our country? Our past and our future are linked. The future beckons us and the past guides us.

What has been our past? India, a mature and a harmonious society, had a rich tradition of learning and a philosophy based on experiences and knowledge of thousands of years. Swami Vivekananda spoke of India as, “the ancient land, where wisdom made its home before it went into any other country”. Ours is a land where religions have taken birth and all religions of the world have found a place. Ours is a land where different languages, cultures and customs flourished. So well known was India for its piety, scholarship and centres of study, that it attracted travellers from across the world. From early times, India always looked at progress and moral growth as mutually inclusive rather than mutually exclusive concepts. India’s depth of thought was matched by its material prosperity. Its fine goods, its spices, its silk, its cotton, were much sought after. India’s traders went to distant lands both to the East and the West, carrying with them not only goods from India, but also its reputation as a land of great culture and wealth.

We are the inheritors of this great civilization whose legacy has been passed on from generation to generation. We can be worthy heirs if we follow, in the true sense, the ideals of political, social and economic justice. Lip service will not do. We have to be ardent adherents. We are also duty-bound to pass on this rich inheritance to our younger generation - the 540 million youth. We place great hope on them and rightly so. They have been demonstrating their capabilities and strengths in various fields of human activity in India and abroad. Whether in multi-national business enterprises or the IT industry or financial organizations or global scientific bodies, young Indians are joining their ranks and making their mark. In sports, they have been bringing laurels to the country. Our youth are the architects of the nation’s future. We must educate them and inculcate in them a spirit of sacrifice, dedication, patriotism and service to the nation. This way, they would be ready to face the future with confidence and build on the achievements made so far.

Dear Citizens,

Where does our country stand today? Our credentials as the world’s largest democracy have been further reinforced with the deepening of democracy at all levels. We have elected bodies existing from the national to the grassroots level. Democracy has given citizens the right to participate in the affairs of the nation. It has become a way of life in India. On the economic front, we are ranked as the world’s fourth largest economy

based on purchasing power parity and one of the fastest growing. The resilience of our economy was evident during the global financial crisis which we weathered, better than many other countries. The future holds great potential and promise. However, many issues demand attention and the way we address them is important.

Foremost, among our tasks is to ensure the welfare of all. It is for this reason that India has adopted inclusive growth as a pillar of its economic edifice and is pro-actively pursuing it. Our task will be complete only when no one sleeps on a hungry stomach, when no one sleeps on the footpath and when every child is in school. Therefore, fittingly, education, capacity building, housing, healthcare and nutrition are a priority on the agenda of the Government. All of us should also pause to think how as responsible citizens, each one of us can contribute to Government efforts in these areas. It is a huge task to be achieved for a billion plus population, but we should not be overwhelmed. In every village and in every colony of every town, city or metropolis, people can come forward to form groups to work for the disadvantaged. Some amongst us may ask, what difference can these small efforts make? For them, I recall a story of a man walking down a beach, moments after a storm. He noticed a person ahead of him picking up starfish washed ashore and throwing them back into the sea. He asked the person how his efforts could make any difference, as the beach was long and there were lakhs of starfish washed ashore who would die. The person looked at the starfish in his hand and threw it into the water saying, "it makes a difference to this one". The message is clear - every effort, big or small, does make a difference.

Dear Citizens,

I believe that empowerment through education is important as it opens many doors of opportunity. The Right to Education Act has made free and compulsory primary education for children a fundamental right. It is important that secondary education is also universalized, as we seek to increase enrollment levels in higher education. This will provide the "brain power" for the nation. We are living in an age where innovation is shaping many areas of human activity. New technologies can enhance our agriculture and industrial productivity. Efficient technologies can facilitate the optimum utilization of capital, labour and resources. We have seen the impact of mobile telephone connectivity even in our villages. Innovation and invention were always given weightage as agents of change but perhaps never as high as now. The categorization of nations as rich and poor, developed and developing may well be overtaken by a new definition of those nations that innovate rapidly, as opposed to those which do so on a lower scale. To be in the forefront of cutting edge technologies, research and development in all fields must be encouraged and pursued in the country.

We must also speed up the construction of physical infrastructure. We need new roads, ports, airports, power projects as well as reinforcement of existing facilities. The augmentation will fill the infrastructural deficit that impedes overall economic growth and is, in many ways, out of sync with our image of an emerging global player.

Our industries must continue to grow. Indian companies should persist with efforts to be efficient and globally competitive. Some are already making their presence felt overseas. Our agriculture requires a fresh perspective, with new and radical ideas to steer it towards a second Green Revolution, so that agriculture production, productivity and profitability are increased. This is essential for our food security as well as price stabilization. At the same time, agriculture cannot be looked at in isolation. It needs to be connected with other sectors of the economy. Linking industry with agriculture would provide a basis for growth of industry in the rural areas and also promote agriculture business. Models of farming which give economies of scale, while protecting the interests of the farmer must be explored. Efficient distribution networks that link farmers with the consumers should be encouraged, so as to bring greater remuneration to farmers for their produce, while giving a price advantage to the consumer. Value addition on-site will generate employment and income opportunities for the local population. Support to the rural poor and farm labour through skill development, vocational training and social welfare programmes, must be a priority. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act is an important mechanism for providing livelihood. If specific local conditions are taken into account in its implementation and innovative approaches for convergence of various Government schemes encouraged, rural growth will be greatly enhanced. For example, agricultural productivity in rain fed areas can be increased with improved farm practices as well as conservation of soil and water, with the construction of farm ponds and village tanks and their proper upkeep and de-silting. Undertaking such activities in a coordinated manner can make a meaningful difference.

However, achievement of goals and targets is dependent on an effective governance structure. Powers have been given to those in Government for formulating policies and for implementation on the field. It should always be remembered that this power must be used in a responsible manner. Zero tolerance towards corruption and working with the highest standards of public service will definitely result in efficient governance systems and will have a multiplier effect on development and growth.

Dear Citizens,

We must be law abiding and also work for moral upliftment. I mention this because with an increasing emphasis on materialism, there is growing insensitivity towards each other. Strong family bonds are weakening. Social consciousness is on the decline. Some social evils persist. This must change. Today is the best opportunity when ground-breaking achievements alongwith a moral and ethical renaissance can take place. In this way, progress would be

anchored in values of compassion, tolerance and selfless service, which are important for making human life meaningful and purposeful. These values will make our multi-cultural, multi-religious, multi-lingual society more robust. They will also give us a strong base on which a stable structure of prosperity and progress can be raised. For example,

as a kite surges high into the sky, it is affected by the breeze and the clouds. If the string is firm and skillfully handled, the kite will stay afloat, otherwise it can go adrift, be cut off, fall and be destroyed. The kite is much like our growth voyage with the string and the firmness with which it is handled, representing the ethical base. India is the abode of infinite values – let us strive to restore these as we go along the path of progress.

Tomorrow's India will be constructed by the hard work of today. I call on all citizens to contribute to making the future of the nation, stronger and brighter. Let everyone understand their role and responsibility to achieve this. As I said earlier, every effort counts. Nation building demands the ability to work diligently and patiently, where the reward is the growth of the nation rather than personal promotion. It requires unity of purpose and the ability to focus on issues which unite. It requires a spirit of conciliation. This is possible when dialogue is chosen as the channel for communication. By listening to each other, respecting each other's viewpoint and understanding one another, we can address issues before us. The proponents of extreme ideologies and the followers of Left Wing Extremism must abandon their path of violence. I call on them to join national efforts for growth and development. I hope that everybody, including the civil society will come forward and move them in this direction. Protracted development efforts will be needed in these areas.

Dear Citizens,

India's growth and progress will take place in an environment that is also influenced by global events. We believe that peace is essential, if prosperity is to be achieved. Terrorism poses the biggest threat to global peace, stability and security. To defeat it, all nations of the world must work collectively, so that terrorists have no sanctuaries, no training grounds, no access to financial resources, no infrastructural support, and no defenders of their ideology. Violence and hatred can have no place in the world. Indeed, the interests that we share as human beings are far more powerful than forces which are divisive. Across the world, the message of peace and not of destruction must

spread, if this Century powered by the most rapid advances in science and technology, is to be the Century of the most spectacular gains made by humankind, accompanied with human values. I am confident that India will contribute substantially to the forward march of the human race.

The human spirit has a tremendous capacity to reach new horizons. With faith in ourselves, faith in our capacity to work together and faith in success, we will continue our journey. We have the talent, to create a great nation; and with our collective will and hard work we will do so. And as we progress and as our flag proudly flutters, like it will tomorrow on Independence Day, we can with pride cite the lines of a well known Indian poet,

Which means:-

Across the skies your fame has spread,  
with every breeze your strength grows.

With these words, I once again wish all Fellow Citizens peace, prosperity and progress  
on the occasion of Independence Day.

Jai Hind.”

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