

**ADDRESS TO THE NATION BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, H.E. SMT.
PRATIBHA DEVISINGH PATIL ON THE EVE OF THE 65TH INDEPENDENCE DAY
AT NEW DELHI ON AUGUST 14, 2011**

Dear Citizens,

As I speak to you on the eve of our 65th Independence Day, I extend my warmest greetings to all of you living in India and overseas. To the members of our Armed Forces and Para-military forces who guard our frontiers, and our internal security forces, I extend special greetings.

This significant day in our nation's calendar takes us back to the events that made our country, a free nation. It is to Mahatma Gandhi - the Father of our Nation, to all the other leaders of our freedom movement, and to the millions of people of our country, who fought with bravery and courage, that we pay homage. Our independence was won on the principles of truth and non-violence. It is this, as well as the transformational impact it had in other parts of the world, that makes our freedom struggle exceptional. In Asia and in Africa, voices of freedom against oppression and colonial power, were encouraged by India's example. We can be proud that we all belong to a country, that has proved its greatness through values, which have found such a wide resonance. We, as the inheritors of that great legacy, carry a responsibility to stand by truth and justice; to continue to conduct ourselves, in a manner that is in consonance, with India's standing, as a progressive and responsible country, where values of democracy, harmony and tolerance are deeply embedded.

Today, our nation stands at a threshold. There are important issues on which we must focus, and as we do so, keep in mind that these are times, when we should also be on our guard, about not straying away from our main objective, of strengthening the nation in its many aspects. This is a time for introspection, a time to take well thought out measures, and to prepare well for the future. There have been occasions earlier, when confronted with many questions, we did find answers. The real strength of a nation is judged not by the challenges it faces, but by its responses. Therefore, as we analyze, make policies, legislate, implement schemes and enforce laws, we must not, forget that the purpose of all our efforts is to move on the path of progress while ensuring that morals and ethics in our society do not get eroded.

India is the world's largest democracy. The country has performed well economically with a growth rate of 8.6 percent last year. We are committed to the welfare of all and are pursuing an inclusive growth agenda. There is much promise, much potential, much hope and

much optimism about our future prospects. I point this out so that, as we deal with the challenges, we should not be unmindful of either our achievements; or of our past; or the principles on which our freedom, Constitution and democracy rest; or very importantly, of our future. Our actions today, our decisions today, will fashion our tomorrow. A deep sense of responsibility is a call of our times. All institutions and all citizens, have to demonstrate great maturity and, if I may say so, a degree of self-restraint, as we deal with our problems.

Corruption is a cancer affecting our nation's political, economic, cultural and social life. It is necessary to eliminate it. Government, Parliament, Judiciary and society at large, should ponder about this, and find out ways to handle it in a manner that is practical, implementable and sustainable. There cannot be just one panacea or remedy to deal with it, but a system of transparency and accountability should be put in place at various levels, and, then, effectively enforced. It would require preventive and punitive measures, as well as adoption of rational approaches as we pursue the anti-corruption agenda. India is known for its sobriety and wisdom, balanced and sensible thinking. As is said in one of our shlokas, “अति सर्वत्र वर्जयेत्” , which means that anything in extreme should be avoided. We need strong institutions and we need good governance in the country. Our institutions need to be fortified and our governance constantly improved. We should analyze the situation and find considered solutions to address the challenges we are facing in a thoughtful manner.

As we look at our past performance, we can draw strength from the fact, that the framework of our Constitution has served us well. The institutions created by it - the Executive, the Legislature and the Judiciary - have been stable and have achieved much. The separation of powers, the elaborate system of checks and balances, have given our country a governance structure in which equilibrium is maintained, when every institution respects the field of responsibility of the others. Credibility of institutions depends upon their conduct, which must be in accordance with the constitutional framework. We should strengthen them and their ability to take corrective actions, whenever required. There should be no effort, consciously or otherwise, that will lead to the erosion of institutional credibility and authority.

Dear Citizens,

Parliament represents people from all parts of our country and a broad spectrum of political thought. Its legislation is an outcome of collective thinking and application of minds. Many path-breaking laws have been made by the Parliament of our country. New laws will

also be formulated by legislative bodies. There can be discussions, debates, discourses among the people of the country for public opinion to emerge, which is an essential input in a true democracy. The different shades of opinion should be channelized, through elected representatives for the formulation of necessary legislation. We should not forget that we have to preserve the democratic values of our country and, for this, healthy conventions of parliamentary procedures should be upheld. Members of Parliament can contribute immensely to issues of national development. There are several instances of commendable initiatives being taken by our elected representatives, including one where young Parliamentarians in the country have come together, cutting across all party lines, to work on malnutrition. I appreciate these initiatives. There is possibility of other such issues which could be collectively addressed by Parliamentarians belonging to all political parties.

Moreover, I strongly feel good electoral practices are linked with a strong functional democracy. Various proposals have been made, from time to time, to reform the electoral process, including on State funding of elections and debarring the participation of criminals in elections. These should be examined early for adoption as a part of our efforts to further enhance the healthy functioning of our democracy and to cleanse the system.

Dear Citizens,

The Census has just been completed in our country. We are now a nation of 1.2 billion, constituting about a sixth of the global population. We will reap a demographic dividend, only when our population is educated and equipped with the necessary skills. This entails a focus on education and skill development, to build their capacities to meet the requirements of the nation. They can add immensely to India's economy - in the service sector, cutting edge technologies, manufacturing, industry, and agriculture. We are a country shaped by the experiences, sacrifices and hard work of our citizens. Indians have shown tremendous enterprise and there are many success stories. They have earned goodwill for the country wherever they are working or they are settled. They have done us proud. Moreover, we must inculcate respect for pluralism, harmonious living and compassion, all of which are a part of our legacy of always upholding the highest human values.

The underlying purpose of our work is to provide to all citizens, opportunities of progress and to eradicate poverty, hunger, disease and illiteracy. I have always said that, it is a growing Gross Domestic Product along with the welfare of the people, that are the twin pillars

of a progressive nation. Today, anti-poverty programmes, social welfare schemes, and a commitment to ensure food security, form the core of our inclusive agenda strategy. There are also a host of special economic packages for the under-developed regions of our nation. Welfare schemes create an entitlement for individuals belonging to identified groups. Delivering the benefits to them is our duty and lack of delivery, a failure. Government efforts need to be supported by voluntary agencies, NGOs and, indeed, by citizens themselves who can be development partners of the Government. Implementation needs to be done in a transparent manner and by creating accountability and integrity in functioning. The country cannot afford the loss of resources meant for its development.

We must persist with our efforts to bridge differentials in economic growth in the country. 68 percent of our population continues to reside in rural areas with a majority dependent on agriculture. Yet, agriculture is one area where we are yet to reach full potential. We need a model to revolutionize agriculture, from the time when agricultural operations start, till harvest is reaped and beyond, where post-harvest processing aspects are addressed. Institutions linked to making available credit, seeds, fertilizers and pesticides, have to be proactive and work in co-ordination with each other. There should be greater use of technology in the agricultural sector to enhance productivity. Also, issues and problems relating to dry land farming, including labour shortage require to be addressed in a focused manner. We may need to examine whether existing rural employment programmes, can be utilized for agricultural land of farmers, whether small holders or otherwise, in rainfed areas. This will help to stabilize agriculture in these areas. At the same time, warehousing and cold storage facilities for agricultural produce in the country require to be augmented. Decentralized warehousing will make food distribution not only easier and quicker, but it would be a low cost option that also cuts on wastage during transportation. I have on several occasions called on the corporate sector, as well as small and medium enterprises to seriously engage with agriculturists and farmers, particularly in the rainfed areas, to avail of the many opportunities of working together for mutual benefit. Let the public sector entities take the lead in this regard. The integration of agriculture with the other sectors of the economy would not only be useful for agriculture, but would generate positive impulses in other sectors as well.

Our Census sadly shows that there has been a decline in the gender ratio in the 0 to 6 age group. It has touched a low level of 914 girls as compared to a 1000 boys. It reflects the continuing preference of boys in our society and the bias against the girl child. We need to fight

social prejudices which have resulted in this situation, and also work to eradicate the practices of dowry, child marriage and female foeticide, which we are continuing to battle even in the 21st Century. Let each citizen of the country vow to fight these social evils. There are laws against them but we need to ensure compliance and create awareness. Moreover, crime against women needs to be dealt with most sternly. Women and men are the two wheels of the chariot of the nation and both need to be strong. Women have tremendous capabilities and capacities to contribute in any field, when given an opportunity. We have seen the success of the movement of the Self Help Groups in our country. Eighty percent of them are all-women groups. They operate at the lower rung of the economic strata and carry out activities on a limited scale. These groups have provided women not only with possibilities of income generating activity, but have given them confidence and a sense of self-esteem. Government should pro-actively take measures to universalize this movement, which will be beneficial to our agenda of women's empowerment.

Dear Citizens,

Events of far reaching consequences are taking place in the world. In a globalised world, these developments have ramifications beyond borders. We are all aware of the consequences of the global financial meltdown of 2008. Uncertainty is again confronting the world economy, and would need to be tackled through co-ordinated global action, as also by suitable precautionary measures in our country. Our economy has fundamental strength and resilience, and its large domestic market can help it maintain steady growth rates. However, price rise is an issue engaging our attention, and would have to be dealt with. Rising prices affects families and especially those of our fellow citizens living below the poverty line. Efforts must be made to find ways and means to soften the impact of inflation, so that the benefits of growth are not blunted.

Also, we are all aware of the threats that terrorism is posing to peace everywhere. The attack in Mumbai last month is yet another grim reminder of the destruction that can be caused by terrorism. We need to be ever-vigilant, to fight this menace which is a global phenomenon.

Dear Citizens,

I recall the words of Swami Vivekanand, "this national ship of ours my countrymen, has been plying for ages, carrying civilization and enriching the whole world with its inestimable treasures." Dear Citizens, the challenge for us, is how effectively we carry forward the nation

from now onwards. Let history be the judge that during our time, we found the right answers to the challenges we faced, and acquitted ourselves with dignity and continued to work with unity, to build the India of our dreams.

Dawn will break tomorrow and our flag will flutter. Whatever task you are doing in the interest of the country is important, and I call on all citizens to pledge, that they will work with full commitment and dedication, honesty and integrity and with a sense of pride. If we do this, there is much that we will be able to achieve as a nation.

With these words, I wish all citizens the very best on the occasion of Independence Day.

JAI HIND!