

ADDRESS TO THE NATION BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND ON THE EVE OF INDIA'S 75TH INDEPENDENCE DAY

Rashtrapati Bhavan, August 14, 2021

My Dear Fellow Citizens,

Namaskar!

1. It is a matter of great joy for me to wish all Indians, living in India and abroad, a very Happy Independence Day! This day has a special significance as it marks the beginning of the 75th year of India's independence for which 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav' is being celebrated. My hearty congratulations to you all on this momentous occasion!

2. Independence Day is a festival of freedom for us. This was made possible by generations of freedom fighters; some known, many unknown. They made great sacrifices. Today, you and I breathe under free skies thanks to their heroic deeds. I bow in respect to the pious memory of those brave martyrs.

3. Our nation, like many others, suffered great injustices and tyranny under foreign rule. What distinguishes India, however, is that the character of our nationalist movement, led by Mahatma Gandhi, was based on the principles of truth and non-violence. He and all other national heroes provided us with an invaluable blueprint to not only liberate the nation from colonial rule, but also to rebuild it. Gandhiji's struggle was for a return to Indian ethos and for human dignity.

4. Now as we look back to the seventy five year journey of our republic, we have reasons to be proud of the considerable distance we have travelled. Gandhiji taught us that slow and steady steps in the right direction are preferable to rapid strides in the wrong direction. The world looks up at the miracle of India, home to the plurality of traditions and yet the biggest and most vibrant democracy.

Dear Fellow Citizens,

5. In the recently concluded Tokyo Olympics, our sportspersons have brought laurels to the nation with their stellar performances. India has won the highest number of medals in the 121 years of its participation in the Olympics. Our daughters have achieved world class excellence in playgrounds overcoming many adversities. Along with sports, epoch-making changes are taking place in the participation and success of women in all walks of life. From higher educational institutions to armed forces, from laboratories to playgrounds, our daughters are making their mark. In this success of our daughters, I see a glimpse of a developed India of the future. I urge every parent to learn from the families of such promising daughters and provide opportunities to their daughters also to explore avenues of growth.

6. Like last year, this year too, the scale of Independence Day celebration may have been reduced due to pandemic, yet our hearts remain always filled with enthusiasm. The intensity of the pandemic has come down, but the coronavirus has not yet gone away. We are yet to come out of the devastating effects of its recurrence this year. Last year, with exceptional efforts from all, we had succeeded in bringing the spread of infections under control. Our scientists had succeeded in developing vaccines in a very short time. Therefore, at the beginning of this year, there was every reason to be hopeful as we launched the largest vaccination exercise in history. Yet, due to the new variants and other unexpected factors, we suffered from a terrible second wave. I am deeply sad that many lives could not be saved and many more suffered immensely in this phase of an unprecedented crisis. I speak for the whole nation when I say that I share the grief of all the affected families with the same intensity.

7. The science is coping with this invisible enemy of terrible might with remarkable speed. We can take solace from the fact that more lives have been saved than the lives lost. It was our collective determination to overcome the challenge that helped us see the weakening of the second wave. Once again, our corona warriors, the doctors, nurses and health workers, the administrators, and others, risked everything to contain the impact of the second wave.

8. The second wave brought our public healthcare infrastructure under stress. The reality is that no infrastructure, even of advanced economies, could withstand a crisis of such enormous proportions. Efforts were made on war-footing to plug the gaps. The leadership rose to the challenge, and the government's endeavours were supplemented by initiatives of the states, private sector healthcare facilities, the civil society and others. In this extraordinary mission, foreign nations shared the essentials generously, just as India had reached out to many nations with medicine, equipment and vaccines. I am grateful to the global fraternity that came forward with a helping hand.

9. Due to these efforts, the nation breathes a sigh of relief with the return of a semblance of normalcy. If we have learned our lessons well, we know that this is the time of extra care and caution. We shall not let our guard down. Vaccines are the best possible protection science offers to us. Under the world's biggest vaccination campaign going on in our country, more than 50 crore fellow citizens have been vaccinated so far. I urge all eligible citizens who are yet to get vaccinated to do so at the earliest and also inspire others.

Dear Fellow Citizens,

10. The economic impact of the pandemic is as disastrous as its health impact. The government has been concerned about the lower middle classes and the poor, as well as about the small and medium industries. It has been sensitive to the needs of the labourers and of employers who have been facing hardships due to the lockdowns and movement restrictions. Sensitive to their needs, the government had

taken a series of relief measures last year. This year also, the government had distributed food grains to about 80 crore people in May and June. This benefit has been extended till Diwali. Moreover, the government has announced a new stimulus package worth Rupees 6 lakh 28 thousand crore to boost the selected Covid-affected sectors. In particular, it is heartening to note that an amount of Rupees 23 thousand 220 crore is being spent over one year for expansion of medical facilities.

11. It is heartening to note that rural India, particularly the agriculture sector has kept growing against all odds. In a recent visit to my ancestral village Paraunkh in Kanpur Dehat district, I was quite pleased to find that better infrastructure is being developed to make life better for people in rural areas. The psychological distance between the urban and the rural is now much less as compared to the past. After all, India lives in its villages which cannot be allowed to lag behind in development. That is why special campaigns, including the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi, are being implemented for the welfare of our farmers.

12. These efforts are consistent with the vision of an Atma Nirbhar Bharat, a self-reliant India. With abiding faith in the inherent capacity of the economy, the government has further opened up defence, health, civil aviation, power and other sectors. The government's new initiatives to promote eco-friendly, renewable sources of energy, particularly solar power, have won praise around the world. If there is an improvement in the ease of doing business, it has a positive impact on the ease of living for all. In addition to these, special emphasis is being given to public welfare. For example, the dream of having a home of one's own is being realised, thanks to the Rupees 70,000 crore credit-linked subsidy scheme. The series of agricultural marketing reforms will empower our 'annadata' farmers and help them get better price for their produce. These are some of the measures the government has taken to unleash the potential of every Indian.

Dear Fellow Citizens,

13. A new dawn is rising in Jammu and Kashmir. The government has initiated the process of consultation with all stakeholders who have faith in democracy and the rule of law. I urge the people, especially the youth, of Jammu and Kashmir to utilise this opportunity and work on realising their aspirations through democratic institutions.

14. With all-round progress, India's stature is rising in the international arena, as it was reflected in our participation in several key multilateral forums as well as in consolidating bilateral relationships with several countries.

Dear Fellow Citizens,

15. When India won Independence 75 years ago, many sceptics thought democracy would not survive in India. Little did they know that roots of democracy were nurtured in this soil in ancient times, and even in modern times India was ahead of many western nations in offering franchise to all adults, regardless of any distinctions. The founding fathers had reposed their faith in the wisdom of the people, and 'we, the people of India' have made India a strong democracy.

16. We have adopted the system of parliamentary democracy. Therefore, our Parliament is the temple of our democracy which provides us highest forum where we discuss, debate and decide issues for the well-being of our people. It is a matter of great pride for all Indians that our Parliament will soon be housed in a new building. It will be a fitting statement of our outlook: It will honour our legacy while also walking in step with the contemporary world. It is more than symbolic that the new building will be inaugurated in the year of the 75th anniversary of Independence.

17. The government has planned many initiatives to make this special year memorable, and the most exciting of them all may as well be the Gaganyaan mission. Pilots of the Indian Air Force have been receiving training abroad. When they fly off into space, India will become only the fourth nation on the planet to carry out a manned space mission.

When it comes to the flights of our ambitions, we don't let any limitations define us.

18. Yet we keep our feet on the ground. We acknowledge that we still have a long way to go in realising the dreams of those who won the freedom for us. Our Constitution neatly summarises those dreams in four words: Justice, Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. We must strive for more equality in an unequal world, more justice in unjust circumstances. Justice has come to encompass a larger range of connotations, including economic and environmental justice. The road ahead is not easy. We will have to negotiate many twists and turns, but we have the benefit of incomparable guidance. It comes to us from diverse sources, from the venerable seers of millennia ago, down to the sages and leaders of more recent times. In the spirit of "unity in diversity", we as a nation are following the right course.

19. This vision derived from the unique Indian heritage is going to be helpful not only to us but to the whole world in this century. Modern industrial civilization has posed serious challenges before humankind. Climate change has become a reality of life, with seas rising, glaciers melting and temperatures soaring. India is proud of not only adhering to the Paris climate agreement but doing more than what the country has committed to protect the climate. However, the world desperately needs a course correction. This is why the world is increasingly turning to the wisdom of India, as created by the authors of the Vedas and Upanishads, as depicted in the Ramayana and Mahabharata, as taught by Lord Mahavira, Lord Buddha and Guru Nanak and as reflected in the lives of the likes of Mahatma Gandhi.

20. Learning the art of living in tune with nature requires effort, Gandhiji says, but once you establish a relationship with rivers and mountains, birds and animals, nature reveals its secrets to you. Let us resolve to listen to this message of Gandhiji and also to make sacrifices for the sake of the land we live in.

21. The spirit of patriotism and sacrifice was paramount among our freedom fighters. They faced all kinds of challenges without caring for

their own interests. I have seen that in the face of Corona crisis, lakhs of people have taken enormous risks to protect others, with the spirit of selfless service for humanity. I convey my profound appreciation for all such covid warriors. Many of them succumbed to Covid-19. I pay homage to them.

22. Recently, on the occasion of 'Kargil Vijay Diwas', I wanted to visit the 'Kargil War Memorial - Dras' in Ladakh to pay homage to our brave soldiers. But due to bad weather, it was not possible for me to reach that monument. On that day, I paid homage to our brave soldiers at the 'Dagger War Memorial' in Baramulla. That memorial has been built in the memory of all the soldiers who have made the supreme sacrifice in their line of duty. While appreciating the valour and sacrifice of those brave warriors, I noticed that the war memorial has a motto inscribed: "मेरा हर काम, देश के नाम" which means, each and every deed of mine is for the nation.

All of us should imbibe this motto as a mantra and work with full devotion and dedication for the development of the nation. I would like that all of us come together to take India forward on the path of progress with the spirit of keeping the interest of the nation and society foremost.

Dear Fellow Citizens,

23. I extend my greetings especially to the members of the armed forces, who have guarded our freedom, valiantly and gladly making supreme sacrifice when necessary. I also extend my greetings to the members of the Indian diaspora, who have represented the motherland well wherever they have made home.

24. I once again congratulate all of you, on the eve of India's 75th Independence Day. While celebrating this anniversary, I cannot stop my mind from imagining a powerful, prosperous and peaceful India of 2047 when we will celebrate 100 years of our independence.

25. I wish that all our people come out of the difficulties caused by the Covid pandemic and move ahead on the path of happiness and prosperity.

Once again, my best wishes to all of you! Thank you,

Jai Hind!