

ADDRESS TO THE NATION BY THE HON'BLE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND, ON THE EVE OF INDIA'S 72ND INDEPENDENCE DAY

Rashtrapati Bhavan, August 14, 2018

Dear Fellow Citizens

1. My greetings to you as we complete 71 years as an independent nation. Tomorrow we will commemorate our 72nd Independence Day. For every Indian, whether living at home or anywhere else in the world, August 15 is sacred. It is marked on our calendars as a celebration of our sovereignty. We unfurl our national flag with great joy and enthusiasm in workplaces, municipalities, panchayats, colleges, schools, homes and neighborhoods. Our Tricolor is a symbol of our national pride. It is a constant reminder of our striving and our self-belief. It is a day to look back with satisfaction and gratitude for what we have been able to achieve due to the efforts of successive generations of our elders. And it is a day to renew our resolve to fill the gaps that still remain in our nation building project – gaps that our talented young people will no doubt fill.
2. Freedom came to our country on the Midnight of August 14-15, 1947. It was the result of years and decades and centuries of sacrifice and valour on the part of our ancestors and our revered freedom fighters. These were men and women of rare courage and foresight. They came from all regions of the country, all sections of society, all communities and all social and economic groups. They could easily have compromised and settled for some personal benefit, but they did not. Their commitment to India – to a free, sovereign, plural and egalitarian India – was absolute. It was my privilege to honour these freedom fighters on the anniversary of 'Quit India Day' on 9th August in Rashtrapati Bhavan.
3. We are fortunate that we have inherited the legacy of such remarkable patriots. They left us with a free India, but they also left us with unfinished tasks for the development of our society, for the empowerment of the proverbial last person, for their liberation from

poverty, and social and economic inequality. Every breath in our collective life as a nation is a tribute to our freedom fighters – and a commitment to accomplish whatever is still unaccomplished.

4. If we define freedom in narrow, political terms, then August 15, 1947, marks a closure. It was the day the political struggle against an imperial power culminated in success and in our Independence Day. But freedom is a broader concept. It is not fixed and finite. Freedom is a constant and relentless endeavour. Even decades after 1947, each one of us can contribute in the manner of a freedom fighter. We can do so if we expand the frontiers of freedom and of opportunity for our fellow Indians and our beloved India.
5. Our farmers grow food for tens of thousands of fellow citizens whom they have not individually met and will never meet. They are upholding our freedom by ensuring food security and nutrition for our children. As we assist our farmers by providing access to technology and other facilities for enhanced productivity and enhanced incomes, we live up to the principles of our freedom struggle.
6. Our Armed Forces stand guard valiantly on our borders, up in the cruel climate of the mountains or under the blazing sun, or in the skies or at sea. They are upholding our freedom by ensuring security from external threats. As we give them better weapons and equipment, build supply chains for such equipment in India itself, or ensure welfare benefits for our soldiers, we live up to the principles of our freedom struggle.
7. Our police and paramilitary forces take on a variety of challenges. In battling terrorism, in fighting crime and law and order disturbances, or even in helping ordinary citizens by holding their hands while they cross a flooded street. In doing this, they are upholding our civic freedom. As we improve their professional and personal conditions, we live up to the principles of our freedom struggle.
8. Women have a special role in our society. The expansion of freedom in our country in many senses amounts to the expansion of freedom for women in our country. This is true whether we see them as

mothers, sisters, daughters or simply as women who are entitled to a life of their choosing – and deserving of the opportunity and the security to fulfil their potential. They could do this as sheet-anchors of our families or as absolutely critical entrants to our institutions of higher learning and our workforce. The choice is theirs; as a nation and as a society we must ensure that they have the right and the ability to exercise that choice.

9. As we take this process further, by facilitating credit for women-run enterprises and start-ups or by easier availability of LPG in millions of kitchens and millions of homes, we live up to the principles of our freedom struggle.
10. Our young people, both boys and girls, represent the hope and optimism of India. Our freedom struggle saw the active participation of the young and the old, but its energy was provided by the young. They chose different modes or activism in their quest for liberty – but their resolve and their idealism, their passion for a free India, for a better India, for a more equal India, was nonnegotiable.
11. Today, as we ignite the fire within our youth, by building capacities for skilling and scholarship; for technology, engineering and entrepreneurship; for creativity and crafts; for playing music and producing mobile apps, for excelling in sports, we are harnessing the unlimited human capital of our youth. In doing so, we live up to the principles of our freedom struggle.
12. I have given only a few examples; there could be many more. The reality is that every Indian who does his or her job with sincerity and commitment, who contributes to society by being true to a professional ethic, be it the doctor's ethic, the nurse's ethic, the teacher's ethic, the public servant's ethic, the factory worker's ethic, the business-person's ethic, the ethic of those who have to care for ageing parents who brought them up with love and sacrifice – each of these and many others are in their own way upholding the values of freedom. They are providing the fruits and goods and services of freedom to fellow citizens. Every citizen of India who does his or her duty sincerely, fulfils a personal and professional obligation and

keeps to a given word is, at a fundamental level, upholding the principles of our freedom struggle. I would argue that every Indian who does not jump the queue and respects the civic space and rights of those ahead in the line also lives up to the principles of our freedom struggle. It's a very small gesture. Let us try and abide by it.

Dear Fellow Citizens

13. You may wonder if what I have said so far would not have held true in the years gone by, maybe 10 or 20 years ago or even earlier. To some extent, it certainly would. Even so, we are at a juncture in our history that is very different from any period we have so far experienced. We are at the cusp of achieving many of our long-awaited goals. Universal access to electricity, the elimination of open defecation, the elimination of homelessness, the very elimination of extreme poverty is achievable and attainable. We are at a pivotal moment. Let contentious issues and extraneous debates not distract us.

14. After four years, we will be marking the 75th anniversary of Independence. In less than 30 years, our people will celebrate the 100th anniversary of India as a free nation. The decisions we take today, the foundations we lay today, the projects we undertake today, the social and economic investments we make today – whether for the immediate future or for the medium term – will determine where we stand. The pace of change and development in our country is rapid and appreciable. And as per our civilisational traditions, it is driven by our people, by civil society and by a partnership between citizen and government. Its focus, again in keeping with the essence of Indian thought, is on a better life for the less fortunate.

15. I will give you just one example. The Gram Swaraj Abhiyan is taking seven flagship programmes to the very doorstep of the poorest and the most deprived among our fellow citizens. These services include access to electricity, access to the formal banking system, access to welfare and insurance programmes, and access to immunisation in hitherto hard-to-reach areas. The Gram Swaraj Abhiyan has been extended to 117 Aspirational Districts where, seven decades after Independence, we still have stark gaps in the development narrative.

16. Not surprisingly there is a significant overlap between the populations of these districts and historically weaker communities, such as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. As such, we have an opportunity to raise the quality of life for those of our fellow citizens who have unfortunately remained at the bottom of the pyramid. The Gram Swaraj Abhiyan is not being carried out by government alone. It is a collaboration of public agencies and community groups, with selfless citizens who are keen to share, to empathise and to give back.

Dear Fellow Citizens

17. Independence Day is always special, but this year there is an unusual significance attached to it. In a few weeks, on 2nd October, we will begin the commemoration of the 150th birthday of Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhiji did not just lead our freedom struggle. He was and still is our moral compass. In my capacity as the President of India, I have been fortunate to have travelled around the world, particularly to a few countries of Africa. Everywhere, across continents, Gandhiji is mentioned, cherished and remembered as an icon for all humanity. He is the embodiment of India.

18. It is not always simple to understand Gandhiji. He refused to be restricted in his definition of politics and political activism, or even of freedom. When Gandhiji and his wife Kasturba, travelled to Champaran in Bihar for the indigo farmers' agitation, they devoted a considerable part of their time to educating local people, particularly women and children, as well as teaching them about hygiene and health. Here, and on other occasions, Gandhiji personally led the

drive for swachhta or cleanliness. He linked the removal of dirt to an act of self-discipline and of promoting physical and mental health.

19. Many were puzzled at that time. What does all this have to do with freedom? For Gandhiji, they were the centre-piece of the quest for freedom. This was a struggle, according to him, not just for political power but for empowering the poorest of the poor, educating the uneducated, ensuring the right to a dignified life and a feasible livelihood for every village, for every neighbourhood, for every family – and for every individual.
20. Gandhiji spoke of swadeshi with an uncommon zeal. To him this was a pride in promoting Indian creativity and an Indian sensibility. Nevertheless, he was alive to intellectual currents from the rest of the world. He invited these to enrich our learning. To him, Indian civilisation was defined by open windows and not closed doors. This was his concept of swadeshi and it is still relevant to us as we engage with the world – whether for our economy, our health, education and social aspirations, or our policy choices.
21. Perhaps Gandhiji's most noble mantra was to point out that the power of ahinsa is far greater than the power of hinsa. The power to stay your hand is far greater than the power to strike with your hand and hinsa has no place in the society. The weapon of ahinsa was the most effective weapon Gandhiji gave us. Like his other teachings, it was rooted in the ancient wisdom of India and yet has a resonance in the 21st century and in our daily lives.
22. This Independence Day, so close to the 150th anniversary commemoration of Gandhiji, let each of us adapt his ideas and maxims, in whatever manner we can in our everyday work and conduct. I can think of no better way to celebrate our freedom. I can think of no better way to celebrate Indianness.
23. And this Indianness is not for us alone. It is part of what our country and our civilisation bring to the global stage. In the spirit of Gandhiji and the spirit of India, we believe in the age-old ideal of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam or the "World is one Family". This is why we

demonstrate our concern for entire humanity by providing assistance to many African countries, taking initiatives on the issue of climate change, contributing to United Nations Peacekeeping Operations in different parts of the world, helping neighbouring countries affected by natural disasters, rescuing people from other countries along with our own people, trapped in a conflict zone. In the spirit of Gandhiji and the spirit of India, we share the practice of yoga for health and well-being, and using technology for development. We are Gandhiji's children. We dream for all humanity, even when we walk alone.

Dear Fellow Citizens

24. In my engagements with students and university authorities all over India, I have urged students to spend a few days – maybe four or five days in a year – in a village. Undertaken as part of what may be termed “University Social Responsibility”, this will help students understand our country. It will allow them to observe and participate in social welfare programmes and see how they are making an impact. It will be of benefit to the individual student and to the village, as well as to the country. It will also invoke the fervour of our freedom struggle, and the identification of every citizen with the national mission.

25. I am gratified by the idealism and the passion of our young people. There is a spirit to achieve something for oneself, for one's family, for wider society and for our country. This is the most moral education we can wish for. The outcome of education is not merely a degree or a diploma, but the commitment to help improve the life of another in a way that is sustainable. This is empathy and fraternity in action. This is the Indian spirit. This is India, because India belongs to the people of India – not just to the Government.

26. Together we can help every citizen in our country. Together we can conserve our forests and natural heritage, we can safeguard our monuments for future generations, we can renew our rural and urban habitats. Together, we can eliminate poverty, illiteracy and inequality. We can and we must do this together. The government has a leading role but not the sole role. Let us use the government's programmes

and projects to further our own efforts. Let us make that sense of ownership our motivation.

27. With those words, I once again wish you and your families all the best for Independence Day and best wishes for a bright future.

Thank you
Jai Hind!