

Address by the Hon'ble President of India Shri Ram Nath Kovind On the eve of 72nd Republic Day

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Dear Fellow Citizens,

Namaskar!

Greetings to all of you on the eve of the 72nd Republic Day of the world's largest and most vibrant democracy. In this land of ours, enriched by diversity, with many festivals, our national festivals are celebrated by everyone with great patriotic fervour. We celebrate the national festival of the Republic Day with enthusiasm and express our respect for the national flag, and our faith in the Constitution.

This day has come to mean a lot to all Indians living within the country and abroad. Seventy-one years ago, on this very day, we the people of India adopted, enacted and gave to ourselves a unique Constitution. For all of us, then, this is the day to also pause and ponder over the core values that the Constitution propounds. These values – Justice, Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity – outlined in the Preamble of our Constitution are sacred to all of us. Its abiding adherence is meant not only for those who are mandated to govern but for the people at large.

It is not without reason that the wise men and women who framed the Constitution chose to place these four terms at the very beginning of the Constitution to build the foundation on which the edifice of our democracy rests. In fact, these were the values that guided our freedom struggle. A galaxy of great leaders and thinkers like Bal Gangadhar 'Tilak', Lala Lajpat Rai, Mahatma Gandhi and Subhas Chandra Bose inspired our freedom struggle. They had diverse dreams of a magnificent future of the motherland, but common to their aspirations were these values: Justice, Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity.

I would like that we go further back into history and inquire why precisely these values guided our nation-builders. And the answer is obvious: This land and its inhabitants have cherished these ideals from the time immemorial. Justice, Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity are perennial principles of our philosophy of life. They come to us from the dawn of this civilisation through an unbroken chain. It is, of course, the task of every generation to seek out the meaning of these values for its times. As the freedom fighters did in their day, so should we in our time. These key principles should light our path to development.

Dear fellow citizens,

Every Indian salutes our farmers, who have made our vast and populous country self-reliant in food-grains and dairy products. Despite adversities of nature, numerous other challenges and the COVID-19 pandemic, our farmers sustained the agricultural production. A grateful nation is fully committed to the welfare of our farmers.

Just as our hardworking farmers ensure food security for the country, the brave soldiers of the armed forces ensure security of our national boundaries amid severest conditions. From the freezing cold at Siachen and Galwan valley in Ladakh with temperatures as low as minus 50 to 60 degree Celsius to the scorching heat in Jaisalmer with temperatures as high as 50 degree Celsius – on land, in the skies and at the vast coastal areas – our warriors are vigilant every moment. Every citizen feels proud about the bravery, patriotism and the spirit of sacrifice among our soldiers.

By their contribution to food security, national security, protection against disease and disasters and to different areas of development, our scientists have strengthened our national endeavours. From space to the farms, from educational institutions to hospitals, the community of scientists has enriched our life and work.

Our scientists have been working day and night for decoding the Coronavirus and they have succeeded in developing the vaccine in record time. With this accomplishment, our scientists have added a glorious chapter of contribution to the well-being of humanity. Our scientists, along with doctors, administrators and people from other walks of life, have made major contribution in containing the virus and keeping the fatality rate lower in our country, compared to that in developed countries. Thus, all our farmers, soldiers and scientists deserve special appreciation and a grateful nation greets them on this auspicious occasion of the Republic Day.

Dear fellow citizens,

Last year, as humanity almost came to a halt in the face of a calamity of gigantic proportions, I often found myself reflecting on the central message of the Constitution. Our effective response to the pandemic would not have been possible without our Constitutional value of 'Fraternity'. Indians have been like a close-knit family, making exemplary sacrifices to protect each other in the face of the common enemy of Coronavirus. I am thinking here of doctors, nurses, paramedics, healthcare administrators and sanitation workers who put their own lives at risk to care for Covid-19 patients. Some of them even lost their lives. Along with them, about 1.5 lakh people became victims of this pandemic. I convey my condolences to the bereaved families. Our frontline Corona-warriors were ordinary citizens who turned out to be extraordinary. When the history of this tragic chapter, which is not yet over, is written, I am confident that the future generations will behold you all for the heroic response to the crisis for which no one could have truly prepared.

Given our country's population density, diversity of cultural traditions, natural and geographical challenges, taking precautionary measures against Covid-19 was far more difficult for us. Yet, we have managed to check the spread of the virus to a large extent.

Despite the serious calamity, we have succeeded in taking forward our activities in many spheres. The pandemic threatened to derail the young generation's learning process, but institutions and teachers quickly adopted new technology and ensured that there was no break in education. By conducting not only free and fair but also safe elections in Bihar which has high population density and in union territories of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh with difficulties of access and other challenges, our democracy and the Election Commission have accomplished remarkable feats. The Judiciary found help in technology and continued to function and dispense Justice. The list is long.

In order to open up the economy without risking the lives of the people, the process of unlocking was carefully calibrated. This has proved effective and the economy has started showing indications of recovery faster than anticipated. The latest unprecedented collection of GST and India's emergence as a most favoured destination for the foreign investment are indicative of our faster economic recovery. The government has encouraged small and medium industries to unleash entrepreneurial spirit by providing easy loans to them and helped them to come up with innovative business ideas.

Dear fellow citizens,

The adversities of the previous year have only reminded us of what we have always known deep in our hearts - that care and concern for humanity and the feeling of fraternity is what kept us together for millennia. In every sphere, Indians rose to the occasion, and put others before themselves. We Indians live and die for humanity. This Indian ideal has been expressed by the great poet Maithili Sharan Gupt in these words:

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In English, these sentiments can be broadly conveyed in the following words:

It is the benevolent whose glory lives on in songs eternal,

It is the generous whom the world reveres forever,

Whose spirit of oneness fills the boundless universe,

They truly are human who die for fellow beings.

I am sure that this love for humanity and the spirit of sacrifice will take us to great heights.

Let us look at 2020 as a year of learning. There were miracles of a revitalising Mother Nature which taught humanity a hard lesson that the Small is not expedient but complementary to the Big. I am sure that with a view to reducing the risk of such pandemics, the issue of climate change will be accorded top priority at the global level.

Dear Fellow Citizens,

Converting a crisis into an opportunity, the Prime Minister gave a call of ‘Atma-Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyan’, or ‘Self-reliant India Mission’. Our vibrant democracy, our enterprising and talented fellow citizens – specially the youth – energise our efforts in shaping a self-reliant India. The demand for goods and services in the country, the domestic efforts to meet them, and the use of modern technology in such efforts are strengthening ‘Atma-Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyan’. Under this Mission, steps have been taken for economic growth as well as employment generation by promoting micro, small and medium enterprises and making the start-up ecosystem more robust. It has become a movement being taken forward by the people themselves.

‘Atma-Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyan’ is in line with the aspiration to shape a new India by the year 2022 when our country turns 75. This will be a significant milestone in the journey of the nation as we are determined to achieve major goals: from providing pucca houses with basic facilities for every family to doubling the income of farmers. In order to build an inclusive society of new India, we are giving special emphasis on education, health, nutrition, upliftment of the under-privileged and welfare of women.

Adversity often plays the role of a great teacher. It makes us stronger and more confident. With that confidence, India has taken great strides in several sectors. Economic reforms have continued apace and have been supplemented by long-pending reforms in the areas of labour and agriculture through legislation. The path to reform at the initial stages may cause misapprehensions. However, it is beyond doubt that the Government remains singularly devoted to farmers’ welfare.

Equally salient but touching more lives directly is the comprehensive reform in education which was long overdue. The ‘National Education Policy 2020’, with its stress on tradition as well as technology, will lay the foundation of a New India which aspires to emerge as a knowledge hub on the international stage. This reform promises to incubate innate talent of students and ignite their minds to take up the challenges of life.

The net outcome of all these efforts is before us. After about a year of this unforeseen ordeal, India today stands not despondent but confident. The slowdown has turned out to be transitory as the economy has regained its dynamism. A self-reliant India has manufactured its own vaccine for Covid-19, and is now undertaking a mass vaccination drive, which will be the largest exercise of its kind in history. The administration and health services are working with full readiness to make this exercise a success. I urge upon the countrymen to utilise this lifeline and get vaccinated as per guidelines. Your health opens the way for your advancement.

Today, India is being rightly called “pharmacy of the world” as we are supplying medicines and other healthcare items to several countries to alleviate people’s suffering and contain the pandemic across the globe. Now we also provide vaccines to other countries.

Dear Fellow Citizens,

The past year was a time of adversity, and it came from many fronts. We faced an expansionist move on our borders, but our valiant soldiers foiled it. To achieve this objective, 20 of them had to lay down their lives. The nation shall remain grateful to those brave soldiers. Though we reiterate our commitment to peace, our defence forces – Army, Air Force and Navy – are adequately mobilised in a well-coordinated move to thwart any attempt to undermine our security. Our national interest will be protected at all costs. We have also ensured a widespread understanding in the international community of India’s firm and principled stand.

India is moving forward and taking its rightful place in the world. During the recent years, its arc of influence has been expanding and encompassing the larger part of the world. The manner in which India got overwhelming support of the international community for its entry as non-permanent member in the Security

Council this year is indicative of that influence. The quality of our engagement with leaders across the world has enhanced manifold. India with its vibrant democracy has rightfully earned its respect as a responsible and trustworthy nation.

We would do well to keep reminding ourselves of our Constitutional mantras. I have said this before, but I will repeat that we should make it a part of our daily routine to meditate upon the life and thought of our Father of the Nation. We must make all efforts to wipe tears from every eye. Equality is the watchword for the great project of our Republic. Social equality warrants dignity for each one of us, villagers, women, weaker sections of our society, namely, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, Divyang-jan and the elderly people. Economic equality entails equal opportunity for all and handholding for the downtrodden. Acts of helping fellow human beings expand our capacity for empathy. In our collective path ahead, Fraternity is our moral compass. Let us all continue on the path of 'constitutional morality' which Babasaheb Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar mentioned in his speech to the Constituent Assembly on November 4, 1948 while presenting the draft of the Constitution. He clarified that 'Constitutional morality' means supremacy of the values enshrined in the Constitution.

Dear Fellow Citizens,

As we are set to celebrate the anniversary of our Republic, I am thinking of our brothers and sisters abroad. Our diaspora is our pride. Indians abroad have succeeded in different walks of life, some rising to high levels of political leadership, some contributing to science, arts, academics, civil society and business, each bringing laurels to their new homelands and also to India. Republic Day greetings to you from the land of your ancestors! My greetings to the members of the armed forces, paramilitary forces and the police who usually celebrate festivals staying away from their families. My special greetings to all those jawans.

I once again congratulate you all, for the Republic Day.

Thank You,

Jai Hind!

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