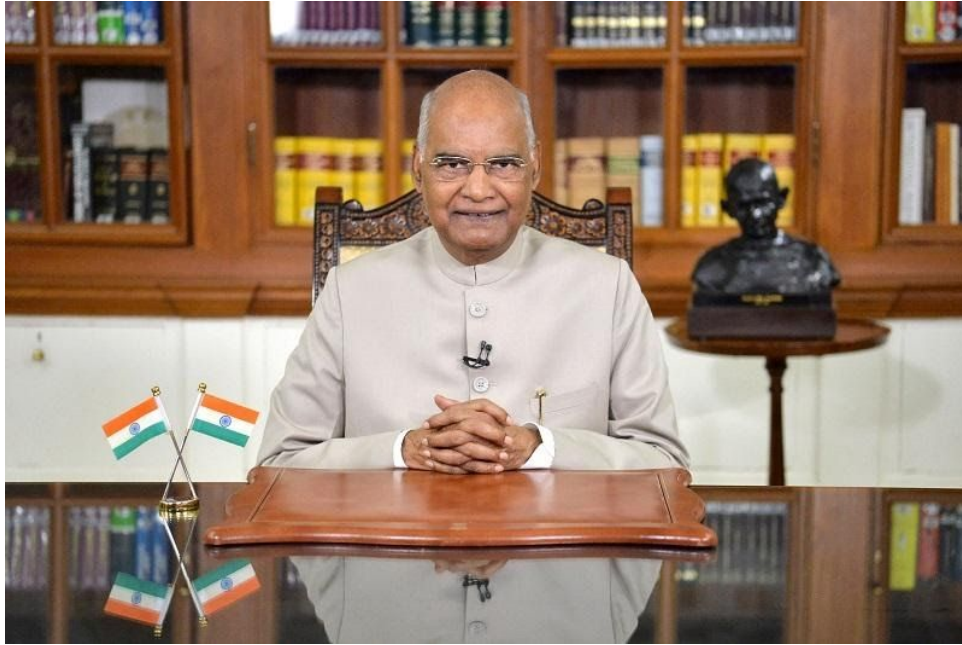


ADDRESS TO THE NATION BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND, ON THE EVE OF INDIA'S 74TH INDEPENDENCE DAY



My Dear Fellow Citizens,

Namaskaar!

1. It gives me great pleasure to greet all the people of India, living in the country and abroad, on the eve of the 74th Independence Day. August 15 fills us with the excitement of unfurling the tricolour, taking part in celebrations and listening to patriotic songs. On this day, the youth of India should feel the special pride of being citizens of a free nation. We gratefully remember our freedom fighters and martyrs whose sacrifices have enabled us to live in an independent nation.

2. The ethos of our freedom struggle forms the foundation of modern India. Our visionary leaders brought together a diversity of world views to forge a common national spirit. They were committed to the cause of liberating Bharat Mata from oppressive foreign rule and securing the future of her children. Their thoughts and actions shaped the identity of India as a modern nation.

3. We are fortunate that Mahatma Gandhi became the guiding light of our freedom movement. As much a saint as a political leader, he was a phenomenon that could have happened only in India. Troubled by social strife,

economic problems, and climate change, the world seeks relief in Gandhiji's teachings. His quest for equality and justice is the mantra for our Republic. I am glad to see the younger generations re-discover Gandhiji.

Dear Fellow Citizens,

4. The celebrations of Independence Day this year will be rather restrained. The reason is obvious. The whole world confronts a deadly virus which has disrupted all activities and taken a huge toll. It has altered the world we lived in before the pandemic.

5. It is very reassuring to note that, the central government, while anticipating the tremendous challenge, responded effectively and well in time. For a country so vast and diverse with high population density, meeting this challenge requires super-human efforts. All state governments took measures in accordance with local circumstances. People also supported whole-heartedly. With our committed efforts, we have succeeded in containing the magnitude of the pandemic and saving a large number of lives. This is worth emulating by the wider world.

6. The nation is indebted to doctors, nurses and other health workers who have been continuously on the forefront of our fight against this virus. Unfortunately, many of them have lost their lives battling the pandemic. They are our national heroes. All Corona Warriors deserve high praise. They go much beyond their call of duty to save lives and ensure essential services. These doctors, health workers, members of Disaster Management Teams, police personnel, sanitation workers, delivery staff, transportation, railway and aviation personnel, providers of various services, government employees, social service organisations and generous citizens have been scripting inspiring stories of courage and selfless service. When cities and towns go quiet and roads are deserted, they work tirelessly to ensure that people are not deprived of health care and relief, water and electricity, transport and communication facilities, milk and vegetables, food and groceries, medicine and other essentials. They risk their own lives to save our life and livelihood.

7. Amid this crisis, Cyclone Amphan hit us in West Bengal and Odisha. Concerted response of Disaster Management Teams, Central and State agencies and alert citizens helped minimize loss of life. Floods have been disrupting lives of our people in the North-East and eastern states. Amid such onslaughts of disasters, it is gratifying to see all sections of society coming together to help those in distress.

Dear Fellow Citizens,

8. The poor and daily wage-earners are the worst hit by the pandemic. In order to support them through this phase of crisis, virus containment-efforts have been supplemented by welfare interventions. By introducing 'Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana', the government has enabled crores of people to earn their livelihood, and mitigate the impact of job-loss, dislocation and disruption caused by the pandemic. The Government continues to extend its helping hand through a number of initiatives, supported whole-heartedly by the corporate sector, civil society and citizens.

9. The needy are being given free food grains, so that no family goes hungry. The largest free food distribution programme in the world has been extended till the end of November 2020 to provide succour to about 80 crore people every month. In order to ensure that migratory ration card holders get ration anywhere in the country, all states are being brought under the coverage of 'One Nation - One Ration Card' scheme.

10. Committed to taking care of our people stranded anywhere in the world, the Government has brought back more than 10 lakh Indians under the 'Vande Bharat Mission'. Indian Railways has been operating train services, in these challenging circumstances, to facilitate travel and transportation of people and goods.

11. Confident of our strengths, we reached out to help other countries in their fight against COVID-19. In responding to calls from countries for supply of medicines, India has once again shown that it stands by the global community in times of distress. We have been at the forefront in evolving regional and global strategies for an effective response to the pandemic. The overwhelming support India got at the elections for the non-permanent seat of the United Nations Security Council is a testimony to the goodwill we enjoy internationally.

12. It has been the tradition of India that we do not just live for ourselves, but work for the well-being of the entire world. India's self-reliance means being self-sufficient without alienating or creating distance from the world. It implies that India will continue to engage with the world economy while maintaining its identity.

Dear Fellow Citizens,

13. The world now realizes what our sages had said long ago: the global community is but one family; 'Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam'. However, even while the world community needs to fight together against the greatest challenge

before humanity, some in our neighbourhood tried to carry out their misadventure of expansion. Our brave soldiers laid down their lives defending our borders. Those worthy sons of Bharat Mata lived and died for national pride. The entire nation salutes the martyrs of Galwan Valley. Every Indian feels grateful to their family members. Their bravery in combat has demonstrated that while we believe in peace, we are also capable of giving a befitting response to any attempt of aggression. We are proud of the members of our Armed Forces, paramilitary forces and police personnel who protect the borders, and ensure our internal security.

14. I believe that in the fight against COVID-19, life and livelihood, both are essential. We have looked at the current crisis as an opportunity to initiate reforms to revitalise the economy for the benefit of all, specially farmers and small entrepreneurs. Landmark reforms have been introduced in agriculture sector. Now, farmers can have barrier-free trade and get the best price for their produce anywhere in the country. The Essential Commodities Act has been amended to remove certain regulatory restrictions on farmers. This will help raise farmers' income.

Dear Fellow Citizens,

15. We have learnt some tough lessons in the year 2020. The invisible virus has demolished the illusion that human being is the master of nature. I believe, it is still not too late for humanity to correct its course and live in harmony with nature. The pandemic, like climate change, has awakened the global community to our shared destiny. In my view, 'human-centric collaboration' is more important than 'economy-centric inclusion', in the present context. The greater this change, the better it will be for the humanity. The twenty-first century should be remembered as the century when humanity put aside differences and collaborated to save the planet.

16. The second lesson is that we are all equal before Mother Nature and we primarily depend on our fellow residents for survival and growth. Coronavirus does not recognize any artificial divisions created by human society. This reinforces the belief that we need to rise above all man-made differences, prejudices, and barriers. Compassion and mutual help have been adopted as basic values by the people in India. We need to further strengthen this virtue in our conduct. Only then can we create a better future for all of us.

17. The third lesson is about augmenting health infrastructure. Public hospitals and laboratories have been leading the fight against COVID-19.

Public health services have helped the poor cope with the pandemic. In view of this, public health infrastructure needs to be expanded and strengthened.

18. The fourth lesson relates to science and technology. The pandemic has highlighted the need to accelerate developments in science and technology. During the lockdown and subsequent unlocking, information and communication technology has emerged as an effective tool for governance, education, business, office work and social connect. It has helped meet the twin objectives of saving lives and resumption of activities.

19. Offices of the Government of India and of the state governments have been extensively using virtual interface to discharge their functions. The judiciary has been conducting virtual court proceedings to deliver justice. In Rashtrapati Bhavan also, we have used technology to conduct virtual conferences and carry out many activities. IT and communication tools have promoted e-learning and distance education. Work-from-home has become the norm in many sectors. Technology has enabled certain establishments in government and private sectors to work overtime to keep the wheels of the economy running. Thus, we have learnt the lesson that adoption of science and technology, in harmony with nature, will help sustain our survival and growth.

20. These lessons will prove useful to humanity. The younger generation has learnt the lessons well, and I believe that the future of India is safe in their hands. These are difficult times for all of us, more so for our youth. The closure of our educational institutions would have caused anxiety among our girls and boys, casting a shadow over their dreams and aspirations for the time being. However, I would like them to remember that these difficult times won't last and they should not give up working for their dreams. The past is full of inspiring examples of exciting reconstruction of societies, economies and countries after such devastations. I am sure that our country and youth have a bright future.

21. With a view to providing futuristic education to our children and youth, the Central Government has decided to implement the National Education Policy. I am confident that with the implementation of this policy, a new quality education system will be developed and this will transform the future challenges into opportunities, paving the way for a New India. Our youth will be able to freely choose their subjects according to their interests and talents. They would have an opportunity to realise their potential. Our future generations will not only be able to get employment on the strength of such abilities but will also create employment opportunities for others.

22. The 'National Education Policy' spells a long term vision with far-reaching impact. It will strengthen the culture of 'Inclusion', 'Innovation' and 'Institution'

in the sphere of education. Imparting education in the mother tongue has been given emphasis in order to help young minds grow spontaneously. This will strengthen Indian languages as well as the unity of the country. Youth empowerment is essential for building a strong nation. The 'National Education Policy' is a right step in this direction.

My Dear Fellow Citizens,

23. Only ten days ago, construction of the temple at Shri Ram Janmabhoomi began, in Ayodhya. It was indeed a moment of pride for all. People of the country maintained restraint and patience for a long time and reposed unflinching trust in the judicial system. The issue of Ram Janmabhoomi was resolved through judicial process. All concerned parties and the people respectfully accepted the verdict of the Supreme Court and displayed before the world, Indian ethos of peace, non-violence, love and harmony. I congratulate all fellow citizens for their commendable conduct.

Dear Fellow Citizens,

24. When India won freedom, many predicted that our experiment with democracy will not last long. They saw our ancient traditions and rich diversity as hurdles in democratization of our polity. But we have always nurtured them as our strengths that make the largest democracy in the world so vibrant. India has to continue playing its leading role for the betterment of humanity.

25. The patience and wisdom being demonstrated by all of you in coping with the pandemic has been appreciated all over the world. I am confident that you will continue to maintain caution and act responsibly.

26. We have a lot to offer to the global community, especially for intellectual and spiritual enrichment and promotion of world-peace. With this spirit, I offer a prayer for the well-being of one and all:

सर्वे भवन्तु सुखिनः, सर्वे सन्तु निरामयाः।

सर्वे भद्राणि पश्यन्तु, मा कश्चिद् दुःखभाग् भवेत्॥

It means:

May all be happy,

May all be free from illness,

May all see what is auspicious,

May no one come to grief.

The message of this prayer for universal well-being is India's unique gift to humanity.

27. I once again congratulate you on the eve of 74th Independence Day. I wish you good health and a bright future.

Thank you,

Jai Hind!