

Highlights of the President's Address to the nation on Republic Day eve



The formation of the Republic on January 26, 1950, was the first milestone in our march towards realising the dreams of our people in the aftermath of Independence. The journey has been long, but we have travelled far. Like any great journey, we have had our moments of triumph and glory as also our share of sorrows and travails. All along we had an abiding faith in the talent and resilience of the people of India. We were inspired during this journey by the values of freedom, tolerance and plurality, which have given to India its defining identity — a country with unity in diversity.

India, consisting of people with different religions, languages and customs, draws its inherent strength from each and everyone of its diverse units. Today, as a nation and as individual citizens, we must pledge to uphold this spirit of solidarity and respect for the multi-cultural, multi-religious and multi-ethnic character of India.

We are the largest democracy in the world and one of the most stable. We have held 14 General Elections to Parliament, in which

power has been transferred to different political parties and groups according to the mandate of the people. Our vibrant and functioning democracy has won universal applause. Today, there are 3.2 million representatives who have been elected from villages, towns and cities. We are also proud that 1.2 million of these elected representatives are women. This is by far the largest number of elected representatives ever in history, or anywhere in the contemporary world.

Our economy is growing at unprecedented rates, and we can be confident that we will be able to achieve the growth targets we have set for ourselves. The impressive strides of the Indian economy have resulted in the emergence of India as a powerful player in the global economy. This century will belong to Asia and India will be one of the main driving forces. It is now time for realising India's tryst with destiny.

As development takes place, we should not forget that the objective is not merely to create wealth. It should be to build a humane society. We must preserve and pro-

tect our rich cultural heritage and its values of compassion and harmonious living. In the joy of song and dance, painting and sculpture, literature and poetry, we should discover and imbibe the best that has been passed on to us from generation to generation over millennia.

India has always had a vision and a message for the world. From the very beginning of our civilisation, we have believed that the world is one and humanity is a single family. India is committed to establish ties of friendship and co-operation with all countries. India's engagement with the world is intensifying both in the economic and political fields. India is a country that has, and is, contributing to regional and global peace and stability.

Today, terrorism constitutes a grave threat to the civilised world. The continuing terrorist attacks are reminders of the need to take collective action. India will continue to work with the international community to create a better world — a world free of terror, poverty, disease, ignorance and inequality. ■