

DEFENCE MINISTER SHRI MANOHAR PARRIKAR'S
CUSTOMARY ADDRESS TO THE ARMED FORCES PERSONNEL
BROADCAST OVER ALL INDIA RADIO ON THE EVE OF
INDEPENDENCE DAY 2016

“My Dear Jawans,

We shall be celebrating our 70th Independence Day tomorrow. On this occasion, I extend my heartiest greetings and best wishes to each one of you serving in the Armed Forces. I extend my greetings to all serving personnel as well as ex-servicemen of the Army, Navy, Air Force and the Coast Guard. I also extend my best wishes to the family members of our Armed Forces personnel, many of whom are deployed far from their homes.

2. On this auspicious occasion, my thoughts are with the near and dear ones of all those who laid down their lives protecting our nation. We are forever indebted to them for their supreme sacrifice. Since the Armed Forces are at the forefront of our nation's defence, I assure you that the Government will do all that is necessary to keep your morale high and to meet your functional requirements.

3. Recently, one AN-32 aircraft which was on way to Port Blair went missing in Bay of Bengal. It was a courier service operated by IAF from Tambaram to Port Blair thrice a week. The aircraft had a crew of six and was carrying 23 defence service personnel. Immediately on receipt of information that the aircraft is missing, resources were deployed from Navy, Air Force and Coast Guard for search and rescue operations.

All the next of kin of crew and passengers on board are being informed and regular updates on the search operations are being given to them by nominated officials. Inputs from all sources are being thoroughly investigated by ships and aircraft, but friends it is very unfortunate that no concrete evidence with respect to missing aircraft has emerged so far.

In this time of uncertainty, we share the pain of families of the defence personnel who were on board and I assure you that the government is making all possible efforts to locate the missing aircraft.

4. Your strong and daring response against terrorists who came fully armed from across the border to attack the Pathankot Airbase was an inspiration to the nation. I commend the efforts put in by our Air Warriors and security forces to thwart this attack. I deeply mourn the martyrdom of seven of our bravehearts who laid down their lives for the cause of the nation in the counter action.

5. Our Armed Forces have shown utmost restraint in tackling terrorists in the Kashmir valley despite grave provocations. You have also effectively repulsed all ceasefire violations in Jammu & Kashmir from across the border and attempts of terrorists to infiltrate into the country with nefarious designs.

6. As in the past, you have been in the forefront of the relief and rescue operations both in India and abroad. The Armed Forces provided succour to the flood victims of Chennai and Gujarat, led the evacuation of Indian and foreign nationals from far-away South Sudan as also provided support to neighbouring cyclone hit Sri Lanka. You helped others without caring for your own comfort to provide food, medicines and medical care. The nation also watched your daring efforts to douse the massive forest fires in the hills of Uttarakhand. My special thanks to you for these efforts.

7. My dear Jawans, it has been a consistent endeavour of the Government to work towards the welfare and wellbeing of Ex-Servicemen. Our government has taken the historic decision to implement One Rank One Pension (OROP) in November last year and fulfilled the long standing demand of the Defence Forces personnel benefitting over 20 lakh Ex-Servicemen pensioners. I am happy to inform that Rs. 3819.33 crores have already been distributed to 18,90,635 defence forces pensioners towards OROP arrears/revised pension.

8. Our government is taking special measures to provide quality and affordable medicare to ex-servicemen and their dependents. As part of health care reforms, we have completely digitized the Ex-Servicemen Contributory Health Scheme (ECHS). A total of over forty-seven lakhs beneficiaries have been covered under ECHS. As of now the scheme is being run through 28 regional centres. A total of 1445 civil hospitals have been empanelled to provide cashless treatment to ECHS beneficiaries.

9. Government is also taking several steps for the welfare of Ex-Servicemen and their families. From 01 April this year, the marriage grant for up to two daughters of Ex-Servicemen has been revised from Rs 16,000 to Rs 50,000. The number of Scholarships under Prime Minister's Scholarship Scheme (PMSS) has been raised from 4000 to 5500 with effect from academic year 2015-2016 to be shared equally between boys and girls. The scheme aims at promoting higher technical and professional education among the wards of Ex-Servicemen /Ex-Coast Guard.

10. Considering the hardships and long separation of Jawans from their families when serving in forward and high altitude areas, I have asked the Ministry to complete the Married Accommodation Project (MAP) on priority. This will provide nearly 2 lakh dwelling units for the married personnel near their places of posting. The third and final phase of MAP is soon expected to be implemented providing 71,000 more dwelling units.

11. You are aware of the need to maintain all round vigil on the nation's borders. Therefore, we should keep our assets in readiness and be able to mobilise troops to forward positions at short notice. At the same time, there is the need to constantly upgrade and modernise our weapon systems and equipment. The government has taken many steps to streamline the procurement process and make it faster and transparent. I am sure this would help you in getting the best weapons and defence platforms in the shortest time.

12. To allow our soldiers to operate in forward areas, our scientists have developed the much needed indigenous 155mm Howitzer guns 'Dhanush'. This advanced gun has now been handed over to the Army for user trials. This will enhance the firepower of our Army to a great extent.

13. This year, the Indian Air Force created history by inducting three women fighter pilots into the combat stream. I salute the Indian Air Force for this path-breaking step.

14. Recently, Tejas, our indigenously designed, developed and manufactured Light Weight Multi-Role fighter was inducted into the Indian Air Force. The formation of the first squadron of Tejas is underway. This is a Light Weight fighter aircraft with advanced avionics. I am confident this new aircraft will help our air warriors in strengthening air defence and attack capability.

15. The sea-trials of "INS Kalveri" – the first in the series of Scorpene class submarines, built at the Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Ltd, Mumbai have started on 01 May 2016. The Indian Navy also commissioned "INS Kochi" the second ship of the indigenously designed and constructed Kolkata-class guided missile destroyer, "INS Kadmatt" the second ship of Project 28 class Anti-Submarine Warfare Corvette and the highly manoeuvrable Fast Attack Craft "INS Tarmugli".

16. In consonance with, India's 'Act East Policy' and growing relation between India and the US and Japan, our naval ships participated in the 20th edition of Exercise Malabar with the US Navy and Japanese Maritime Self Defence Force in the Pacific Ocean. The exercise significantly helped in developing better inter-operability among these three navies, which also showcased India's efforts in developing defence cooperation.

17. To cope with the challenges of operating in a digital world, we are taking a number of steps to digitize the communication network of the three Services for their seamless working. The recent inauguration of Defence Communication Network (DCN) will put in place a communication system to facilitate jointness. Implementation of DCN is a proof of strength of the Indian industry. It also reaffirms the progress made on the Digital India Programme. It is also a major step towards ensuring Network Centricity across the three Services, Integrated Defence Staff and Strategic Forces Command.

18. I congratulate the scientists and technologists of DRDO and other defence related establishments for their good work in equipping our Armed Forces with the latest State-of-the-art weapons and equipment, developed and produced indigenously.

19. With these words, I once again extend my greetings to all of you and your family members on the eve of Independence Day. Let us take a pledge on the occasion of our Independence Day to defend and serve our motherland with all our might and to the best of our abilities, for a better and brighter future for the nation.

20. Jai Hind!