

INDEPENDENCE DAY ADDRESS

Modi vows to continue fight against graft, black money

Says note ban, benami property law and taking down shell companies part of the battle; points to more I-T returns

FE BUREAU
New Delhi, August 15

"TODAY, THE country is celebrating the festival of honesty," Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared during his fourth Independence Day address to the nation on Tuesday, explaining how demonetisation, the benami property law and the shutting down of shell or fake companies have together mounted an unprecedented onslaught on black money and corruption. Modi vowed to continue the fight against both scourges, on the promise to obliterate which the National Democratic Alliance stormed to power in May 2014.

In his 56-minute speech devoid of any grand new announcements but catered specifically to the poor and the middle class, the prime minister summoned the collective strength of the nation, as witnessed during the half decade to

THE STATISTICS

5.75 cr



Farmers under crop insurance now, up from 3.25 crore 3 years ago

₹3 lakh cr



Cash that had remained outside the banking system but returned after demonetisation

56 lakh

New I-T return filings between April 1 and August 5, 2017, up from 22 lakh in the year-ago period



₹1.25 lakh cr

Black money unearthed in 3 years



₹1.75 lakh cr

Cash deposits after demonetisation under investigation



1.75 lakh

Shell companies' registrations cancelled



Independence, to create a "New India" by 2022. Modi's plan is notwithstanding the fact that his government has less than two years to go. In his first address to the nation after the NDA's emphatic electoral victory in May 2014, Modi had expressed his intent to have a s10-year uninterrupted run as prime minister to achieve his stated objectives of socio-economic development and governance improvement.

Even as many have ques-

tioned the efficacy of demonetisation — some even called it an elaborate exercise in futility — Modi's address to the nation on 71st Independence Day was his stoutest defence of the over one-and-half-month exercise after it was concluded in December last year. Since the NDA came to power, he said, black money to the tune of ₹1.25 lakh crore has been confiscated. He added that of the scrapped currencies that reached the banks after demonetisation, ₹1.75 lakh crore was

"under scrutiny". "According to the research conducted by outside experts, about ₹3 lakh crore that had never come into the banking system before has been brought into the system after demonetisation," he said. During demonetisation, as many as 18 lakh people deposited amounts that could not be explained with their known means of income.

Benami property worth ₹800 crore had been seized already thanks to the new law, he said. "Of some 3 lakh shell companies identified, 1.75 lakh have been shut."

The prime minister also highlighted the surge in filing of income tax returns as proof of the note-swap exercise's high utility. During April-August this year, 56 lakh people have filed tax returns for the first time, against 22 lakh in the same period last year, a growth of 25%. However, higher growth rates in returns filed were witnessed in the past — for instance, in 2011-12, the number of I-T returns were 80% higher than in the previous year. According to government data, for assessment year 2016-17, 5.28 crore taxpayers filed the returns as against 4.31 crore for the previous year.

Continued on Page 2

Modi vows to continue fight against graft, black money

Modi described the implementation of the goods and services tax as a key illustration of cooperative federalism, adding that removal

of check posts at state borders under the new system resulted in a 30% increase in efficiency of goods transportation via roads.

Listing his government's achievements in the last more than three years, the prime minister said over 5.75 crore farmers have been covered under the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Beema Yojana and 30 projects have been completed under the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana, while work was on for 50 more projects. "More than 14,000 un-electrified villages have been electrified,

29 crore JanDhan accounts opened and more than 8 crore youth have received loans without any guarantee," he said.

Modi lauded farmers and the agricultural scientists for record crop production this last year. He said the government had procured 16 lakh tonnes of pulses this year, far in excess of the procurement of previous years.

He called for a New India where the poor would have houses, and access to water and electricity; where farmers would be free from worry, and would earn twice of what they earn today; youth and women would get ample opportunities to fulfil their dreams; an India free from terrorism, communalism, casteism, corruption and nepotism; and an India that is clean and healthy.

Modi said the changing nature of technology was resulting in the requirement of different skill-sets for employment. He also added that the youth is being nurtured to become job-creators, and not job-seekers.

"We are taking the nation on a new track (of development) and are moving ahead with speed," he said, adding that the government was devoting significant attention to the eastern states of Bihar, Assam, West Bengal and Odisha, and the northeast. "These parts have to grow further," he said.