

Vladimir Putin's Address to the Federal Assembly

February 29, 2024

<https://www.voltairenet.org/article220510.html>

Senators, State Duma deputies,

Citizens of Russia,

The primary purpose of every Address to the Federal Assembly is to offer a forward-looking perspective. Today, we will discuss not only our short-term plans, but also our strategic objectives and matters which, I believe, are instrumental in ensuring steady long-term development for our country.

This programme of action and the specific measures it includes largely result from my trips to the regions and the conversations I had with workers and engineers at civilian and defence plants, as well as with doctors, teachers, researchers, volunteers, entrepreneurs, large families, with our frontline heroes, volunteers, soldiers and officers of the Russian Armed Forces. Of course, it's clear that these conversations, these meetings don't come out of nowhere – they are organised. Still, these exchanges do offer people an opportunity to talk about their pressing needs. Many ideas came from major civil society and expert forums.

The proposals submitted by our people, their aspirations and hopes became the foundation, served as the main pillar of the projects and initiatives that will be also announced today, during this Address. It is my hope that public discussion on these topics will continue, since it is only together that we can fulfil all our plans. In fact, we have major tasks ahead of us.

We have already proven that we can deliver on the most challenging objectives and respond to any challenges, even the most formidable ones. For example, there was a time when we fended off international terrorist aggression and preserved our national unity, preventing our country from being torn into pieces.

We supported our brothers and sisters; we supported their decision to be with Russia, and this year marks the tenth anniversary of the legendary Russian Spring. But even now, the energy, sincerity and courage of its heroes – the people of Crimea, Sevastopol, and the rebellious Donbass – their love for the Motherland, which they carried through generations, naturally makes one proud. This certainly inspires us and strengthens our confidence that we will overcome anything, that we will be able to do anything together.

This is how – all hands on deck – we were able to eliminate the deadly threat of the Covid-19 pandemic just recently. Moreover, by doing that, we also showed the world that values such as compassion, mutual support and solidarity prevail in our society.

And today, when our Motherland is defending its sovereignty and security, defending the lives of our compatriots in Donbass and Novorossiia, our citizens are playing the decisive role in this righteous struggle – their unity and devotion to our country, and our shared responsibility for its future.

They clearly and unequivocally demonstrated these qualities at the very beginning of the special military operation, when it was supported by the absolute majority of Russians. Despite the hardest trials and bitter losses, people have remained adamant in their choice and are reaffirming it by trying to do as much as possible for their country and for the common good.

Russian industries are working in three shifts to roll out as many products as the front needs. The entire economy, which provides the industrial and technological foundation for our victory, has shown flexibility and resilience. I would like to thank every business leader, engineer, worker and farmer for their responsible and hard work in the interests of Russia.

Millions of people have joined the We Are Together campaign and the Russian Popular Front's project Everything for Victory! Over the past two years, Russian businesses have donated billions of rubles to volunteer organisations and charitable foundations that support our soldiers and their families.

People send letters and parcels, warm clothes and camouflage nets to the front; they donate money from their savings, sometimes very modest. Again, this kind of assistance is invaluable – it is everyone's contribution to the common victory. Our heroes at the frontline, in the trenches, where it is most difficult, know that the whole country is with them.

I would like to acknowledge the Defenders of the Fatherland Foundation, the Committee of the Warriors of the Fatherland Families, and other public associations for their tireless efforts. I urge the authorities at all levels to continue providing unwavering support to the families of our heroes, including their parents, spouses, and children, who anxiously await the safe return of their loved ones.

I am grateful to the parliamentary parties for uniting around national interests. Russia's political system stands as one of the pillars of our country's sovereignty. We will continue to advance democratic institutions and resist any external interference in our internal affairs.

The so-called West, with its colonial practices and penchant for inciting ethnic conflicts around the world, not only seeks to impede our progress but also envisions a Russia that is a dependent, declining, and dying space where they can do as they please. In fact, they want to replicate in Russia what they have done in numerous other countries, including Ukraine: sowing discord in our home and weakening us from within. But they were wrong, which has become abundantly clear now that they ran up against the firm resolve and determination of our multi-ethnic people.

Our soldiers and officers – Christians and Muslims, Buddhists and followers of Judaism, people representing different ethnicities, cultures, and regions – proved with their actions

which are stronger than a thousand words that the centuries-old cohesion and unity of the people of Russia are a formidable and invincible force. All of them, shoulder to shoulder, are fighting for our shared Motherland.

Together, as citizens of Russia, we will stand united in defence of our freedom and our right to a peaceful and dignified existence. We will chart our own course, to safeguard the continuity of generations, and thus the continuity of historical development, and address the challenges facing the country based on our outlook on the world, our traditions and beliefs, which we will pass down to our children.

Friends,

The defence and the strengthening of sovereignty are going on across the board, primarily, on the frontlines, where our troops are fighting with steadfast and selfless resolve.

I am grateful to everyone who is fighting for the interests of the Fatherland, who endure the crucible of military trials, and put their lives on the line every day. The entire nation has the deepest respect for your feat, mourns the dead, and Russia will always remember its fallen heroes.

(A moment of silence.)

Our Armed Forces have acquired a lot of experience, including in terms of coordinating all the wings of the military, as well as mastering the latest tactics and methods of war. This effort has given us so many talented and seasoned commanders who treasure their men and are diligent in performing their missions, know how to use new equipment and are effective when fulfilling their assignments. I would like to emphasise that this is happening at all levels, from platoons and operations units to the highest command.

We are aware of the challenges we face. They do exist. That being said, we also know what needs to be done to address them. There is an ongoing and unrelenting effort unfolding both

along the frontlines and in the rear in this regard in order to improve the striking power of the Army and the Fleet, to make them more tech-savvy and effective.

The Armed Forces have expanded their combat capabilities many-fold. Our units have seized the initiative and will not surrender it. They are confidently advancing in several operational theatres and liberating more territories.

We were not the ones who started the war in Donbass, but, as I have already said many times, we will do everything to put an end to it, eradicate Nazism and fulfil all the objectives of the special military operation, as well as defend sovereignty and ensure that our people are safe.

The strategic nuclear forces are on full combat alert and the ability to use them is assured. We have either already accomplished or are about to accomplish all our plans in terms of weapons in keeping with what I said in my 2018 Address.

Kinzhal, the hypersonic air-launched complex, has not only entered combat duty, but has been effective when carrying out strikes against critical targets during the special military operation. By the same token, Zircon, a ship-based hypersonic missile complex, has already served in combat. It was not even mentioned during the 2018 address, but this missile system has also entered combat duty.

Avangard hypersonic ICBMs, as well as the Peresvet laser complexes have also entered combat duty. Burevestnik, a cruise missile with an unlimited range, is about to complete its testing stage and so is the Poseidon, an unmanned underwater vehicle. These systems have proven that they meet the highest standards and it would not be an exaggeration to say that they offer unique capabilities. Our troops also received the first serially produced Sarmat heavy ballistic missiles. Soon, we will show them to you on their combat alert duty in the areas of their deployment.

Efforts to develop several other new weapons systems continue, and we are expecting to hear even more about the achievements of our researchers and weapons manufacturers.

Russia is ready for dialogue with the United States on issues of strategic stability. However, it is important to clarify that in this case we are dealing with a state whose ruling circles are taking openly hostile actions towards us. So, they seriously intend to discuss strategic security issues with us while simultaneously trying to inflict strategic defeat on Russia on the battlefield, as they themselves say.

Here is a good example of their hypocrisy. They have recently made unfounded allegations, in particular, against Russia, regarding plans to deploy nuclear weapons in space. Such fake narratives, and this story is unequivocally false, are designed to involve us in negotiations on their conditions, which will only benefit the United States.

At the same time, they have blocked our proposal which has been on the table for over 15 years. I am referring to the agreement on preventing the deployment of weapons in outer space, which we drafted back in 2008. There has been zero reaction to it. It is totally unclear what they are talking about.

Therefore, there are reasons to suspect that the current US administration's professed interest in discussing strategic stability with us is merely demagoguery. They simply want to show to their citizens and the world, especially in the lead-up to the presidential election that they continue to rule the world, that they would talk with the Russians when it will benefit them and that there is nothing to talk about and they will try to inflict defeat on us otherwise. Business as usual, as they say.

But this is unacceptable, of course. Our position is clear: if you want to discuss security and stability issues that are critical for the entire planet, this must be done as a package including, of course, all aspects that have to do with our national interests and have a direct bearing on the security of our country, the security of Russia.

We are also aware of the Western attempts to draw us into an arms race, thereby exhausting us, mirroring the strategy they successfully employed with the Soviet Union in the 1980s. Let

me remind you that in 1981–1988, the Soviet Union's military spending amounted to 13 percent of GDP.

Our current imperative is to bolster our defence industry in such a way as to increase our country's scientific, technological and industrial capabilities. We must allocate resources as judiciously as possible, fostering an efficient economy for the Armed Forces, and maximising the return on each ruble of our defence spending. It is crucial for us to expedite the resolution of social, demographic, infrastructural and other problems we face while simultaneously advancing the quality of equipment for the Russian Army and Navy.

This primarily applies to general-purpose forces, refining the principles of their organisation and deploying advanced unmanned strike systems, systems of air defence and electronic warfare, reconnaissance and communications, high-precision weapons and other types of weapons to the troops.

We need to shore up the forces in the western strategic theatre in order to counteract the threats posed by NATO's further eastward expansion, with Sweden and Finland joining the alliance.

The West has provoked conflicts in Ukraine, the Middle East, and other regions around the world while consistently propagating falsehoods. Now they have the audacity to say that Russia harbours intentions of attacking Europe. Can you believe it? We all know that their claims are utterly baseless. And at the same time, they are selecting targets to strike on our territory and contemplating the most efficient means of destruction. Now they have started talking about the possibility of deploying NATO military contingents to Ukraine.

But we remember what happened to those who sent their contingents to the territory of our country once before. Today, any potential aggressors will face far graver consequences. They must grasp that we also have weapons – yes, they know this, as I have just said – capable of striking targets on their territory.

Everything they are inventing now, spooking the world with the threat of a conflict involving nuclear weapons, which potentially means the end of civilisation – don't they realise this? The problem is that these are people who have never faced profound adversity; they have no conception of the horrors of war. We – even the younger generation of Russians – have endured such trials during the fight against international terrorism in the Caucasus, and now, in the conflict in Ukraine. But they continue to think of this as a kind of action cartoon.

Indeed, just like any other ideology promoting racism, national superiority or exceptionalism, Russophobia is blinding and stupefying. The United States and its satellites have, in fact, dismantled the European security system which has created risks for everyone.

Clearly, a new equal and indivisible security framework must be created in Eurasia in the foreseeable future. We are ready for a substantive discussion on this subject with all countries and associations that may be interested in it. At the same time, I would like to reiterate (I think this is important for everyone) that no enduring international order is possible without a strong and sovereign Russia.

We strive to unite the global majority's efforts to respond to international challenges, such as turbulent transformation of the world economy, trade, finance, and technology markets, when former monopolies and stereotypes associated with them are collapsing.

For example, in 2028, the BRICS countries, with account taken of the new members, will create about 37 percent of global GDP, while the G7 numbers will fall below 28 percent. These figures are quite telling because the situation was completely different just 10 or 15 years ago. You have heard me say it publicly before. These are the trends, you see. These are the global trends, and there is no escaping them since they are objective reality.

Look, the G7 countries' share in global GDP in terms of PPP stood at 45.7 percent in 1992, while the BRICS countries (this association did not exist in 1992) accounted for only 16.5 percent. In 2022, though, the G7 accounted for 30.3 percent, while BRICS had 31.5 percent. By 2028, the percentage will shift even more in favour of BRICS, with 36.6 percent, and the

projected figure for the G7 is 27.8 percent. There is no getting away from this objective reality, and it will remain that way no matter what happens next, including even in Ukraine.

We will continue to work with friendly countries to create effective and safe logistics corridors, relying on cutting-edge solutions for building a new global financial architecture that would be free from any political interference. This is especially important considering that the West has been undermining its own currencies and banking system by literally sawing off the branch it is sitting on.

The principles of equality and respect for each other's interests guide us in our interactions with our partners. This is why more and more countries have been proactive in seeking to be part of the activities of the EAEU, the SCO, BRICS and other associations involving Russia. We see a lot of promise in the project to build a Greater Eurasian Partnership and aligning integration processes within the Eurasian Economic Union and China's Belt and Road Initiative.

There has been positive momentum in Russia's dialogue with ASEAN. The Russia-Africa summits have been a real breakthrough, with the African continent becoming increasingly assertive in pursuing its interests and enjoying genuine sovereignty. We sincerely support these aspirations.

Russia has long-standing and positive relations with Arab states, which have their own unique and vibrant civilisation spanning across North Africa and the Middle East. It is our belief that we must find new points of convergence with our Arab friends and deepen our partnerships across the board. The same vision will guide our relations with Latin America.

On a separate note, I would like to ask the Government to allocate more funding to international programmes for promoting the Russian language and our multi-ethnic culture, primarily within the CIS space but also across the world.

Incidentally, friends and colleagues, I am sure that many of you have been to the Russia exhibition. People go there to see how rich and vast our homeland is and to show this to their children. The Year of the Family has been launched there. The values of love, mutual support and trust are handed down from generation to generation, just like our culture, traditions, history, and moral principles.

But the main purpose of the family is to have children, to procreate, to bring up children and hence to ensure the survival of our multi-ethnic nation. We can see what is taking place in some countries where moral standards and the family are being deliberately destroyed and entire nations are pushed to extinction and decadence. We have chosen life. Russia has been and remains a stronghold of the traditional values on which human civilisation stands. Our choice is supported by the majority of people in the world, including millions in Western countries.

True, today birth rates are declining in Russia and many other countries. Demographers say that this challenge is related to changes in social, economic, technological, cultural and value perceptions throughout the world. Young people get an education, try to make a career, and improve their living conditions, leaving children for later.

It is obvious that the economy and the quality of the social sector are not the only factors affecting demography and the birth rate. The life choices encouraged in the family and by our culture and education also have a tremendous impact. All levels of government, civil society, and the clergy of all our traditional religions must contribute to this.

Support for families with children is our fundamental moral choice. A multi-child family must become a norm, the underlying social philosophy, and the focus of state strategy. (Applause.) I join your applause.

We must ensure sustainable growth in the birth rate within the next six years. With this aim in view, we will make additional decisions regarding the education system as well as regional and economic development. I will speak about supporting families and improving the quality

of their lives in nearly all parts of the Address. Please bear with me, for I have barely started. Everything I have already said is important too, but now I will speak about the most important issues.

I will begin with a major issue, to put it mildly, which is the low incomes experienced by many large families. In 2000, more than 42 million Russians lived below the poverty line, but the situation has changed dramatically since then. As of the end of last year, the number of people living below the poverty line declined to 13.5 million which is also a lot, though. But we are constantly focused on finding a solution to this problem.

A number of measures have been adopted relatively recently. For example, a single monthly allowance for low-income families was introduced on January 1, 2023. It is payable from the time a mother becomes pregnant until the child reaches 17 years of age. Last year, more than 11 million people received it.

We have drastically simplified the procedure for concluding a social contract, prioritising large families. Now, an application for a social contract can be submitted through the Gosuslugi (government services) website with a minimum set of documents. We will work to expand the availability of this service, which will require extra funding to the tune of 100 billion rubles. This money has already been set aside. In general, all the additional spending I am going to mention has been budgeted.

To reiterate, poverty remains an acute problem which now directly affects more than 9 percent of the population. According to experts, the poverty rate among families with many children is about 30 percent. We must set clear goals and consistently achieve them. By 2030, the overall poverty rate in Russia must be below 7 percent, and for large families, it must be no more than 12 percent, or less than half of today's 30 percent. That is, we must place special emphasis on the effort to reduce poverty, first and foremost for families with many children.

I know that overcoming poverty is not easy and is an absolutely systemic and multi-vector effort. So, to reiterate, it is important to make sure that everything we do in this area, and

every tool we use, is effective and efficient and produces tangible real results for our people and our families.

What we need is an uninterrupted effort aimed at improving the quality of life of families with children and supporting the birth rate. To achieve this goal, we will launch a new national project titled "Family."

I will now talk about a number of specific initiatives.

First, in addition to federal programmes, Russian regions are implementing their own measures to support families with children. Above all, I would like to thank my colleagues for this work and propose providing additional assistance to the regions where the birth rate is below the national average. This is especially important for central and northwestern Russia. In 2022, 39 regions had a total fertility rate below the national average. By the end of 2030, we will channel at least 75 billion rubles to these regions so that they can increase their family support programmes. The funds will begin to be disbursed next year.

Second, last year, more than 110 million square metres of housing were built in Russia, or 50 percent more than the highest Soviet-era level, which was achieved in 1987. At that time, 72.8 million square metres were built, and now, the result is 110 million.

More importantly, over the past six years, millions of Russian families have moved to bigger or better housing; over 900,000 of them took advantage of the family mortgage programme – the one launched in 2018, for reference. We have been steadily expanding eligibility for this programme over time, from families with two or more children, to families with one child today. The programme will continue until July 2024. I propose further extending it until 2030 while maintaining its basic parameters. Particular attention should be paid to families with children under six; the preferential loan interest rate will remain at six percent for such families.

There is something else. The government currently subsidises 450,000 rubles of a family's mortgage when they have a third child. I also propose extending this measure until 2030. This year, this support plan will require almost 50 billion rubles; the amount will increase further, but we have the money for this.

Our wider goal is to make the housing that is now under construction more affordable for families, and to ensure a system-wide renewal of the housing stock in the country.

Third, there are over two million families in Russia with three or more children. It goes without saying that we are very proud of these families.

Here is what I wanted to say in this regard. Look at these numbers – these are real-world figures. Between 2018 and 2022, the number of families with many children in Russia increased by 26.8 percent, which is a positive result.

I signed an executive order creating a single national status for families with many children. This is what people have been asking for. We must follow up on its provisions by taking concrete federal and regional decisions in keeping with people's aspirations, of course.

Families with many children have so many matters they have to take care of, so parents must have more resources on hand to deal with their everyday challenges. I suggest doubling the tax deduction parents get when having their second child to 2,800 rubles per month and increasing this benefit for the third and every consecutive child to 6,000 rubles.

What does this mean? Let me give you an example: this will enable a family with three children to save 1,300 rubles per month. I also suggest increasing the annual income counted towards this deduction from 350,000 to 450,000 rubles. And this support measure must apply automatically without people having to apply for it.

On a separate note, I would like to mention the maternity capital benefit. Today, parents can receive 630,000 rubles when their first child is born, and when the second one arrives, the

family gets another 202,000 rubles. We have regularly adjusted this benefit for inflation. For now, the maternity capital programme is set to expire by early 2026, but I suggest extending it until at least 2030.

Colleagues,

I would like to thank charity foundations and community service non-profits which are helping the elderly, people suffering from various diseases and children with disabilities. They have done a great deal to raise the issue of long-term care at the national level. They were the ones who constantly raised these issues.

I believe that we need to allocate more federal funding to this system and follow a single high standard of care. This includes improving its availability for about half a million Russians who are most in need of this kind of assistance.

By 2030, we need to make sure that 100 percent of the people who need this kind of long-term care can benefit from it.

Presently the average life expectancy in Russia has exceeded 73 years. We have returned to the level we were at before the COVID-19 pandemic. By 2030, life expectancy in Russia should be at least 78 years, and in the future, as we planned, we will reach the level of 80 plus.

Particular attention should be paid to rural areas and regions where life expectancy is still lower than the average in Russia. The Long and Active Life national project will focus on achieving these objectives. It is especially important to prolong the healthy and active period in a person's life, so that he or she can enjoy family activities, be with loved ones, children, and grandchildren.

We will continue to implement federal projects to combat cardiovascular diseases, cancer, and diabetes.

Furthermore, I propose launching a new comprehensive programme to protect motherhood and help children and adolescents maintain good health, including their reproductive health, ensuring that children are born healthy and grow up to be healthy adults, and produce healthy children in the future.

The new programme's priorities should include expanding the national network of women's health clinics and upgrading perinatal centres, children's clinics and hospitals. In total, in the next six years we will additionally allocate more than a trillion rubles for the construction, repair, and equipping of healthcare facilities alone.

Next. The number of Russians who engage in sports activities on a regular basis has increased significantly in recent years. This is one of our major achievements. We need to encourage people who take responsibility for their own health. As early as next year, we will introduce tax deductions for those who regularly undergo scheduled medical examinations, as well as successfully pass the standard GTO physical fitness test.

Do you remember this popular slogan? Everyone remembers that joke: "Stop drinking – start skiing!" Appears to be the case, the time is now. By the way, on the subject of drinking, we have achieved a noticeable, positive result. In fact, we have significantly reduced the consumption of alcohol, primarily strong alcohol, without imposing any extreme restrictions, which should certainly improve the health of the nation.

I suggest channelling federal money into building at least 350 additional sports facilities every year in the regions, primarily in small towns and rural areas. This could include multi-purpose venues, as well as structures that can be erected quickly to be used by children, adults, and families. We will allocate some 65 billion rubles in federal money to this effect over the next six years.

Universities, vocational colleges, schools, and preschool institutions must also create conditions for doing sports. By the way, many of our kindergartens opened back in the Soviet

era and need refurbishing. Next year, we will launch a major renovation programme for them. I have been hearing about this issue from the people I talk to all the time.

As for the schools, about 18,500 buildings need major repairs. We will help the regions deal with their backlog of issues in this sector so that they can switch from urgent to planned repairs. Judging by what has been achieved so far, we are on the right track. Overall, we will allocate over 400 billion rubles for undertaking major repairs at kindergartens and schools.

In addition to this, I propose renovating or opening medical rooms in schools that are in need of this type of service. Today, I mean in 2022–2023, only 65 percent out of 39,000 schools we have (and we have 39,440 schools in total), had medical facilities, which means that we have room for improvement here.

There is another important topic. Many big cities are rapidly expanding, which in turn increases the burden on their social services. Many schools have had to switch to double or even triple shifts. Of course, this is a challenge and we must deal with it. We will have to engage federal resources for resolving this issue by building at least 150 schools and over 100 kindergartens in the worst-affected cities facing overcrowded educational institutions.

Colleagues,

The dreams and accomplishments of our ancestors are within our reach and we can take pride in these achievements, while it is the aspirations of our younger generation that will determine the future of our country. Their coming-of-age, their successes, their moral guidelines, which can stand up to any challenge, are the most important guarantees of Russia's sovereignty and the continuation of our history.

I propose consolidating the positive experience we have achieved with our youth policy and launching a new national project this year, the Youth of Russia. This project should focus on our country's future and work towards that future. This is what our schoolteachers see as

their calling, their grand mission, as they realise that they are responsible for younger generations, and we are grateful to them for their selfless work.

Mentors play a major role in making children feel like they are part of a united team and in providing them support in life. I propose establishing a 5,000 ruble monthly federal benefit for advisors to directors who consult them on child development at schools and colleges, with a launch date of September 1, 2024. This will be a new support measure. I also propose we implement support measure for class teachers at schools, as well as for group supervisors, both at colleges and technical schools, in communities with a population of less than 100,000 people. Such communities need special attention, and in fact, most small towns and villages across Russia fall in this category. So, from March 1, 2024, I propose doubling the federal payment for classroom management and group supervision to eligible education workers to 10,000 rubles.

There is one more thing I would like to add. In 2018, the May executive orders set forth the requirements for the remuneration of teachers and other public sector employees based on an average monthly income from employment in a particular region of Russia. These provisions of the so-called May executive orders must continue to be strictly adhered to. At the same time, we need to improve the system of remuneration in the public sector and to boost the incomes of its employees.

The average pay in the economy differs from region to region, which means that people's incomes in the public sector are sometimes widely different even in neighbouring entities of the federation. But the jobs of teachers and doctors are difficult and demand that they accept extreme responsibility no matter where they are. Without question, this large difference in salaries between regions is unjust.

I know that it is an old, complicated, and capital-intensive issue, if I may address it this way. I have discussed this with my colleagues from federal agencies, the heads of regions, teachers, doctors, and other professionals. And it is clear we must do something about it.

I will not go into detail now, but it is most certainly a complicated matter. The members of parliament and the Government know what I am talking about. I ask the Government to coordinate in 2025 a new system of payment for public sector employees within existing pilot projects in the regions and to adopt a final decision for the country as a whole in 2026.

A separate issue has to do with creating additional incentives for attracting young professionals to schools where they will see professional and career opportunities. Towards this end, we will approve targeted allocations of over 9 billion rubles from the federal budget for improving the infrastructure of teacher training universities.

Our system of school education has always been famous for its innovative teachers and unique teaching methods. It is teams of such teachers that will take part in creating forward-looking schools. The construction of the first leadership schools of this kind will begin this year in the Ryazan, Pskov, Belgorod, Nizhny Novgorod, and Novgorod regions. They will subsequently be built in all the federal districts, in the Far East, Siberia, and Donbass. Overall, we will open 12 such schools by 2030.

As for educational content, the workload of our children must be reasonable and balanced. And it is definitely not good when children are taught one thing during lessons and asked completely different things during exams. This discrepancy, to put it mildly, between the curriculum and the questions asked during exams, which regrettably happens, is forcing parents to hire private tutors, which not every family can afford. I ask our colleagues in the Government to work together with teachers and parents to settle this most-evident problem.

In this connection I would like to say a few words about the Unified State Exam, which is a matter of broad public discussion and debate, as we all know. It is true that the mechanism of the unified exam must be improved.

What do I suggest at this stage? I propose taking one more step by giving high school graduates a second chance. In particular, they will have an option to re-sit an examination in one of the unified exam subjects before the university enrolment period ends so that they

can resubmit their new grades. Such matters may seem mundane, but they are in fact quite important to the people.

Colleagues,

Last year, Russia's economy grew faster than the world economy, and we outperformed not only the leading EU countries, but all G7 economies as well. Here is what I would like to note in this regard: the massive reserves created over the past decades have had much to do with that.

The share of non-commodity industries in the growth structure now stands at well over 90 percent, which means that the economy has become more complex and technological, and thus, much more sustainable. Russia is Europe's largest economy in terms of gross domestic product and purchasing power parity, and the world's fifth largest economy.

The pace and, most importantly, the quality of growth make it possible to hope and even assert that we will be able to take another step forward in the near future and become the world's fourth largest economy. This kind of growth should have a direct effect on household incomes.

The share of wages in the national GDP should increase within the next six years. We are adjusting the minimum wage ahead of inflation rates and average wage growth rates in the economy. Starting in 2020, the minimum wage has increased by 50 percent from 12,000 to 19,000 rubles per month. By 2030, the minimum wage will have almost doubled to 35,000 rubles, which will certainly make a difference in the number of social benefits and salaries in the public and economic sectors.

We are aware of the risks and factors that may lead to a slowdown in economic growth and our progress in general. These include, primarily, shortages in skilled personnel and our own advanced technology and even total lack of it in some areas. We need to be proactive in this regard, so I will discuss these two strategically important topics in detail today.

I will start with personnel. Russia has a large young generation. Strangely enough, we are facing demographic issues related to population growth, but still have a fairly large young generation. In 2030, this country will have 8.3 million people aged 20 to 24, and 9.7 million, or 2.4 million more than now, in 2035. Without a doubt, this is the result of the demographic measures in previous years, among other things.

Importantly, today's teenagers should become professionals primed to work in the economy of the 21st century. This is the focus of the new Personnel national project.

We have been discussing this a lot, but we really need to strengthen the link between all levels of education from school to university. They should work as one for a common result. Of course, the involvement of future employers is important. A career guidance system has been launched in all schools nationwide this year. Sixth-graders and up can get familiar with different specialties.

I am now urging the heads of enterprises, research and medical centres to encourage schoolchildren to visit them. Let them see the workshops, like I was offered to do during one of my trips, the museums, and laboratories. Please make sure to join in this effort.

Promoting close cooperation between educational institutions and the real economy has guided us in the Professionalitet project for promoting vocational training. It enabled us to update educational programmes for the aviation, shipbuilding, pharmaceutical, electronics, and defence industries, among others.

We will have to train about a million highly skilled workers for these sectors by 2028, while making sure that the vocational training system as a whole transitions to these approaches, including in terms of developing human resources for schools, hospitals, outpatient clinics, the services sector, tourism, cultural institutions and creative industries.

On a separate note, I am instructing the Government to work with the regions on a programme to refurbish and equip vocational training institutions. This effort must go beyond renovating educational facilities and also cover athletic facilities, as well as student dormitories serving these vocational training schools and colleges. We will allocate 120 billion rubles in federal funding for these purposes over the next six-year period.

We will also spend an additional 124 billion rubles to carry out major repairs at about 800 university dormitories over the next six years.

As for higher education in general, our task is to develop research and educational centres all across our country. For that, we will build 25 university campuses by 2030. We have already discussed this but it bears repeating. I suggest that we expand this programme to build at least 40 student campuses of that kind.

To do so, we will have to allocate some 400 billion rubles from the federal budget in order to ensure that students, post-graduates, faculty members and young families have all they need to study, work and bring up their children.

Overall, we must sift through all the different situations young mothers or young parents face in their lives and use this information to fine-tune and improve public services, the social sector, healthcare, as well as urban and rural infrastructure. I am asking the Government and the region to take due care when working on this agenda.

Moving on, in last year's Address, I announced major changes in the way our higher education system operates and talked about the need to use best national practices. The foundation of future success in a profession is laid in the first years of university, when core subjects are taught. I believe that we need to offer those who teach these subjects higher salaries. Therefore, I am asking the Government to suggest specific modalities for making this happen and launch a pilot project beginning September 1.

This will require additional resources. According to preliminary estimates, this would amount to about 1.5 billion this year and 4.5 billion down the road. We have factored these amounts into our projections.

It is important for us to bolster the capabilities and quality of the national higher education system, to support universities that are striving for development. These targets are being met by our Priority 2030 programme. The funding for this has been allocated through the end of this year. I certainly propose extending it for another six years and allocating an additional 190 billion rubles.

The efficiency criteria for participating universities should include personnel and technology projects with Russia's regions, industries and social sector, the creation of effective innovative companies and start-ups, and the ability to attract foreign students. In addition, we will certainly assess all Russian universities, colleges, and technical schools by the demand for their graduates from the labour market and their pay growth.

Friends,

I would like to say a few words about the technological foundation for development, and here, science is certainly the cornerstone. At a meeting with scientists from the Russian Academy of Sciences, which marked its 300th anniversary this year, I said that, even during the most difficult periods, Russia has never given up on addressing its fundamental imperatives, has always thought about the future, and we must do the same now. As a matter of fact, we are trying to do exactly that.

For example, no other country in the world has such a range of mega-science facilities as Russia has today. These centres provide unique opportunities for our scientists and for our partners, researchers from other countries, whom we invite for collaboration.

Russia's scientific infrastructure is our strong competitive advantage, both in the context of fundamental research and in creating innovations for pharmaceuticals, biology, medicine, microelectronics, chemicals, and new materials, as well as for space programmes.

I believe that we should more than double the total public and private investment in research and development, to as much as two percent of GDP by 2030. This should secure Russia's place as one of the world's leading scientific powers.

I would like to reiterate that private business should simultaneously increase investment in science, at least doubling the current programmes by 2030. It is understood that these funds should be spent effectively, should be instrumental in achieving a specific result in each specific research project. In this regard, we need to use the positive experience of our federal research programmes in genetics and agriculture, as well as projects promoted by the Russian Science Foundation.

In light of the current goals and challenges, we have adjusted Russia's Strategy for Scientific and Technological Development which we use as a starting point to launch new technological sovereignty national projects. I will give you a list of the main areas.

First, we must be independent and own all the technological keys in sensitive areas, such as safeguarding public health and ensuring food security.

Second, we need to attain technological sovereignty in critical spheres that determine the resilience of our economy in general, such as means of production and machine tools, robotics, all modes of transport, unmanned aerial, underwater and other systems, data economy, innovative materials and chemistry.

Third, we must create globally competitive products relying on unique domestic innovations, including space, nuclear and new energy technologies. We must start working now to create a legal environment that fosters industries and markets of the future, to generate long-term

demand – at least through the end of the current decade – for high-tech products so that companies have consistent rules to play by.

It is also imperative to establish internal cooperative chains and international technological platforms, to launch serial production of our own equipment and components, and to guide geological exploration towards the search for rare-earth materials and other raw materials for the new economy. We have all this.

To reiterate, we are talking about a strategic foothold for the future, so let us use all available development tools and mechanisms to achieve these objectives, and to ensure priority budget financing. I urge the Government and the Federal Assembly to be mindful of this when drafting the budget. Please always treat this as a top priority.

Technological sovereignty projects should become an engine to renew our industry and help the entire economy reach an advanced level of efficiency and competitiveness. I propose setting the goal of increasing the share of domestic high-tech goods and services on the domestic market by 150 percent within the next six years, and increasing the volume of non-commodity and non-energy exports by at least two-thirds.

I will cite a few more figures. In 1999, the share of imports in our country reached 26 percent of GDP meaning that imports accounted for almost 30 percent of our market. Last year, it was 19 percent of GDP, or 32 trillion rubles. Before 2030, we need to reach a level of imports of no more than 17 percent of GDP.

This means that we must produce ourselves many more consumer and other goods, including medicine, equipment, machine tools, and vehicles. We are unable to produce everything, and we do not need to, but the Government knows what it needs to work on.

I would like to point out that in the next six years the gross added value in manufacturing should increase by at least 40 percent compared to 2022. This accelerated industrial

development implies the creation of thousands of new enterprises and modern highly paid jobs.

We have already prepared an industrial "menu" of sorts. The companies that implement industrial projects will be able to choose suitable support measures, agreements on investment protection and incentives, special investment contracts, a cluster investment platform, and the like. We have devised and are already implementing a great deal of such instruments. And we will further develop these mechanisms.

In the next six years, we will additionally allocate 120 billion rubles to subsidise corporate R&D projects and to bolster the system of industrial mortgages. We will also use this programme to additionally build and renovate over 10 million square metres of industrial floorspace.

I would like to add the following for the sake of comparison, in addition to the pace we have already achieved.

So, let's draw some comparisons. Today, in Russia we build about four million square metres of industrial floorspace every year. It is a substantial indicator of the modernisation of our industrial capacities as it is, and we will additionally build 10 million square metres, as I have stated.

Next, we will invest 300 billion rubles in the Industrial Development Fund. We will almost double its capital and will focus its attention on supporting high-tech projects. At least 200 billion rubles will be additionally allocated within the framework of a cluster innovation platform to subsidise interest rates for projects that manufacture prioritised industrial products.

I propose increasing the depreciation calculation base to stimulate the modernisation of industrial facilities in the manufacturing sector. It will amount to 200 percent of spending on Russian-made equipment and R&D. It may sound boring, but I will explain what it means. If

a company buys Russian-made lathes for 10 billion rubles, it can reduce its tax base by 20 million rubles. It amounts to substantial assistance.

We will continue to develop industrial technology parks focused on small and medium-sized companies in the priority technological spheres. It is important to make use of the advantages of the cluster approach, when companies grow together with their subcontractors and suppliers, and their cooperation will have a beneficial effect on all parties. I would like to point out to the Government that we must create at least 100 such platforms by 2030. They will act as growth points throughout the national territory and encourage investment.

We have set a goal to add 70 percent to investment in key sectors by 2030. By the way, we have had good dynamics here; very good, I would say in fact. Good.

In 2021, the cumulative growth of investment was 8.6 percent, against a target of 4.5 percent. In 2022, it was 15.9 percent, with a target of 9.5 percent. In the first nine months of 2023, the increase was 26.6 percent, when the plan for the year was 15.1 percent. We must continue to move ahead of the plan.

Our banking system and the stock market must fully ensure the influx of capital into the economy, into the real sector, including through project and equity financing. In the next two years, industrial projects worth more than 200 billion rubles will be supported through equity funds. Essentially, this means that the VEB.RF Development Corporation and several commercial banks will join the share capital of high-tech companies and assist them during the most active growth phase.

I have already issued instructions to introduce a special IPO regime for companies in priority high-tech industries. I would like to point out to my colleagues in the Finance Ministry and the Central Bank that we need to expedite the launch of this mechanism, including compensation for the company's costs associated with floating securities. This needs to be done without delay.

Again, the Russian stock market needs to play a bigger role as a source of investment. Its capitalisation should double by 2030, from the current level to 66 percent of GDP. At the same time, it is important that individuals have the opportunity to contribute to the nation's development while also benefiting from investing their savings in low risk projects.

A decision has already been made: voluntary investment in non-state pension funds of up to 2.8 million rubles will be insured by the state, which means a return is guaranteed.

In addition, long-term individual investment accounts will be insured up to 1.4 million rubles. We will extend the unified tax deduction to individual investments in long-term financial instruments up to 400,000 rubles per year.

At the same time, I deem it expedient to launch a new tool known as a savings certificate. By purchasing this product, individuals will deposit their savings in banks for more than three years. The certificate will be irrevocable; therefore, banks will offer their clients a more attractive interest rate. In addition, the holders of savings certificates will have their money insured by the state up to 2.8 million rubles, which is twice as much as regular bank deposit insurance.

I would like to emphasise that all the measures of state support for investment, and the creation and modernisation of industrial facilities, should lead to higher salaries and better working conditions, and social packages for employees.

Of course, as a matter of principle, Russian companies must operate within our national jurisdiction and refrain from moving their funds abroad where, as it turns out, you can lose everything. So now, my colleagues from the business community and I have to hold brainstorming sessions for coming up with ways to help them get their money back. Do not transfer your money there in the first place. This way, we will not have to figure out how to recover it.

Russian businesses must invest their resources in Russia, its regions, in developing companies and staff training. Our strong and sovereign country offers them unrivalled protection for their assets and capital.

An overwhelming majority of business leaders prioritise national interests and are patriots. Therefore, businesses working here in Russia must benefit from the guaranteed inviolability of their property, assets, and new investments. Of course, domestic investment and protecting investment go hand in hand with defending the rights of business owners, and it is our job to make this a reality. This will serve our national interests and society at large, as well as the millions of people who work for private companies, whether they're large corporations or SMEs.

I have been saying this all along, but let me repeat it: no one, no government official or law enforcement officer, has the right to harass people, break the law or use it for personal, selfish objectives. We must be there for people, for our business owners – I am talking about them right now. They are the ones creating jobs, giving people work and paying their salaries. Being there for others and helping them is what the mission of the government is all about.

Colleagues,

Small and medium-sized enterprises are playing an increasingly important role in driving economic growth. Today, they account for over 21 percent of the manufacturing, tourism, and IT sectors. Hundreds of Russian brands have demonstrated outstanding results. Last year, there were 1.2 million new SMEs registered in Russia.

Let me draw your attention to the fact that this is a five-year high. People want to start their own businesses and believe in themselves, their country, and their success. I would like to emphasise that the number of young entrepreneurs under 25 years old increased by 20 percent in 2023. There are now over 240,000 of them.

We need to make sure to support these creative and result-driven undertakings in order to ensure that the average income for SME workers outpaces GDP growth over the next six years. This means that these businesses must enhance their efficiency and make a qualitative leap forward in their performance.

I have already said that we must eliminate situations where expanding operations becomes a losing proposition for companies because they have to switch from a streamlined tax framework with its beneficial rates to a general tax regime. When this happens it means that the state is basically promoting corporate fragmentation or compelling businesses to use other means for optimising their tax liabilities.

I am asking the Government to work with the parliamentarians on the terms of an amnesty for SMEs which had no other option than to rely on tax optimisation schemes as they expanded their operations.

Importantly, these companies should steer clear of the practice of artificial, essentially fraudulent, splitting of businesses, and embrace civilised and transparent operations. To reiterate, there will be no fines, no penalties, no sanctions, no recomputation of taxes for the earlier periods. This is what the amnesty is all about.

In addition, I hereby instruct the Government to introduce a mechanism for a gradual – not abrupt – increase in the tax burden for companies that are transitioning from the simplified to the general taxation procedure starting next year.

Next, we decided to introduce a temporary moratorium on inspections. This measure has fully justified itself. Companies that guarantee the quality of their products and services and act responsibly with regard to their consumers can and should enjoy our trust.

So, from January 1, 2025, I believe we can rescind temporary moratoriums on business inspections and instead, building on our experience, fully switch to a risk-based approach

and enshrine it in the law. If there are no risks, we should use preventive measures and thus minimise the number of inspections.

There is more. I propose granting special credit holidays of up to six months once every five years to small and medium-sized businesses, without impacting their credit history.

Again, we must create proper conditions for small and medium-sized companies to grow dynamically, and to enhance the quality of this growth through high-tech forms of manufacturing. In general, the taxation regime for small and medium-sized manufacturing companies should be relaxed.

I urge the Government to make specific proposals in this regard. We have discussed this many times. Please do that. The proposals have been articulated, in fact.

I would like to emphasise the work of small and medium-sized businesses in rural areas, in the agriculture sector. We are now fully self-sufficient in terms of food, and Russia is the leader on the global wheat market. We are among the top 20 food exporters. I thank agricultural workers, farmers, and specialists engaged in agriculture in general for their impressive performance.

By 2030, the output of the Russian agro-industrial complex should grow by at least a quarter compared to 2021, and exports should increase by 50 percent. We will definitely continue to support the sector and the programme of integrated rural development, including renovation and modernisation of post offices.

We will use a special solution for the development of coastal regions. Let me remind you that we have a "quota for the keel" rule. It must be strictly followed. As some of you here are aware, we are talking about the companies obtaining quotas for seafood production against an obligation to buy new Russian-made fishing vessels and renew the fleet.

At the same time, this year the federal budget received a substantial amount of money – about 200 billion rubles – from selling seafood quotas. Mr Siluanov is here, and we have arrived at an agreement. I propose that part of these funds be earmarked for the social development of municipalities, which form the basis of our fishing industry.

Colleagues,

In today's conditions, increasing efficiency in all spheres of labour productivity is directly connected with digitalisation and the use of AI technology, as I said. Such solutions enable us to create digital platforms for streamlining interaction between people, businesses and the state in the best possible way.

So, we need to create a platform that will help people use the capabilities of our healthcare system to keep their health in check and remain healthy throughout their life. For example, they will be able to use data from their digital identities to remotely request and receive advice from specialists at federal medical centres, and general practitioners will be able to form a comprehensive picture of a patient's health, forecast possible illnesses, prevent complications, and choose individual, and thus, more effective treatment.

Everything I am saying is not a picture of a distant future. These practices are being introduced at our leading medical centres today. The goal is to apply them throughout the country and make them accessible to all.

I believe that by 2030 we must formulate digital platforms in every major economic sector and in the social sphere. These and other comprehensive tasks will be addressed within the framework of the new national project The Economy of Data. We will allocate at least 700 billion rubles to implement it in the next six years.

Such technologies and integration platforms offer great opportunities for the economic planning and development of individual sectors, regions, and cities, as well as for the efficient management of our programmes and national projects. The most important thing is that we

can continue to focus the efforts of all levels of government on the interests of every individual and every family, and to proactively provide state and municipal services to our people and businesses in a convenient form and as quickly as possible.

Russia is actually one of the world leaders in digital government services already. Many countries, including European ones, have yet to reach our level. But we have no intention of slowing down.

Artificial intelligence is an important element of digital platforms. Here, too, Russia must be self-sufficient and competitive. An executive order has already been signed approving the updated version of the National Strategy for the Development of Artificial Intelligence. The document sets new goals, including the need to ensure technological sovereignty in such revolutionary fields as generative artificial intelligence and large language models. Practical application of such systems promises to produce a real breakthrough in the economy and social sphere, and so it shall. For this we need to increase our computing resources. By 2030, the total capacity of domestic supercomputers should be at least 10 times greater. This is a completely realistic goal.

We need to upgrade the entire infrastructure of the data economy. I would like to ask the Government to propose specific measures to support companies and start-ups that manufacture data storage and processing equipment and develop software. Investment in domestic IT should grow at least twice as fast as overall economic growth.

Conditions need to be created to allow Russians to take advantage of digital technology not only in megacities, but also in smaller towns, in rural communities and in remote areas, along federal and regional thoroughfares, as well as local roads. I am referring to the need to provide access to high-speed internet almost everywhere in Russia within the next decade. To address this task, we will need to considerably expand our satellite constellation, for which we will be allocating 116 billion rubles.

Colleagues,

At this point, I would like to dwell on regional development. What are my suggestions on this matter? Our priority is to lower the debt burden of the Russian regions. I believe that we must write off two thirds of the debt regions owe under so-called budget loans. According to our projections, this will allow them to save about 200 billion rubles annually between 2025 and 2028.

Let me draw your attention to the fact that these savings must be used for a specific purpose – the regions should channel them into support for investment and infrastructure projects. Colleagues, I would like to draw your attention to this point.

Moving on, in 2021, we launched a programme worth 500 billion rubles to issue infrastructure budget loans and went on to expand it to one trillion rubles. As you remember, the regions benefit from a 3 percent interest rate on these loans with a term of up to 15 years. What a great development tool. These funds go towards development projects, and the regions have appreciated this mechanism for its effectiveness. There will be no write-offs for these loans, but this year the regions will start repaying them. I suggest re-investing the money they return to the federal budget in the regions by issuing new infrastructure budget loans. Overall, we will expand our infrastructure loan portfolio for Russia's regions starting in 2025 by at least 250 billion rubles per year.

I also believe that the regions must have more leverage when it comes to managing the funds at their disposal for fulfilling national projects.

Let me give you an example: a region upgrades an outpatient clinic and does a good job refurbishing it. If it did not spend all the funds allocated for this, it would not have to return the remainder to the federal budget. Instead, it can use them to buy equipment for the renovated clinic or for other purposes.

Of course, we will support the regions to enable them to unlock their potential by launching projects in the real economy and infrastructure development as development drivers for these territories.

Today, ten regions of the Federation that have low fiscal capacity are carrying out tailor-made socioeconomic development programmes. I am asking the Government to renew these programmes for another six-year term.

By 2030, all our regions must achieve economic self-sufficiency. Let me repeat that this is a matter of justice and offering people equal opportunities, as well as guaranteeing high living standards across the country.

Colleagues,

As you can see, big plans call for big spending. Large-scale social, demographic and economic investments will be made, as well as science, technology, and infrastructure investments.

In this regard, I would like to discuss the taxation system. It goes without saying that it must ensure the flow of resources to address national goals and to implement regional programmes. It is designed to reduce inequality not only in society, but in the socioeconomic development of the constituent entities of the Federation as well, and to take into account individual incomes and corporate revenues.

I suggest developing approaches to modernising the fiscal system and more fairly distributing the tax burden towards those with higher individual incomes and corporate revenues.

Conversely, we need to reduce the tax burden on families, including through deductions, which I mentioned earlier today. We need to incentivise businesses that invest in growth and in infrastructure and social projects. It is likewise important to close loopholes that are used by some companies to avoid taxes or underreport their taxable revenue. I urge the State

Duma and the Government to submit a specific set of proposals to address these matters soon. In the future, taking into account the adopted changes, I propose locking in key tax parameters until 2030 to ensure a stable and predictable environment for implementing any, including long-term, investment projects. This is what the business community is asking for during our direct contacts.

Colleagues,

Decisions regarding financial support for the regions and economic growth should be designed to improve the quality of life in all constituent entities of the Federation. We have already renewed until 2030 special programmes for the development of the regions such as the North Caucasus and the Kaliningrad Region, Donbass and Novorossiya, Crimea and Sevastopol, the Arctic and the Far East. Master development plans have been drafted for 22 Far Eastern cities and metropolitan areas, and the same work is underway for Arctic communities.

Now we have to take the next step. I propose making a new list of more than 200 cities and towns, with a master plan to be developed and implemented for each of them. Overall, the development programme should span about 2,000 communities, including villages and small towns. Every policy to support the regions that I mentioned today, including infrastructure loans, should apply in these cases.

I would like to address the heads of the regions now. These resources should be used, among other things, to expand the capabilities of the municipalities. I remember meeting with the heads of some municipalities at their forum here in Moscow. The local level of government has a special role and responsibility. It includes the agencies and bodies where Russians go with their daily needs. I would like to thank our mayors, heads of districts, and local deputies for their work, for their attention to people's needs. And I would like to specially recognise the staff of the municipalities working in the immediate vicinity of the combat zone and sharing all the adversities with the local residents.

Local residents should in fact be co-creators of their local urban development plans. Municipalities need to step up the use of mechanisms where residents can vote for projects, facilities or problems that require priority financing. I propose increasing the federal and regional co-financing of people's projects like this.

We will also extend, until 2030, the national competition for best projects to create a comfortable urban environment in small towns and historical communities.

In total, we will improve more than 30,000 public spaces in Russia in the next six years. I would like to ask the Government to provide additional support to the regions that are renovating local embankments, parks, gardens and historical downtown areas. We will allocate 360 billion rubles for major landscaping and improvement projects like this.

Old buildings, estates and churches are the visible embodiment of our national identity, an inextricable link between generations. I would like to ask the Government, parliament and relevant State Council commissions to involve the public and review the regulatory framework for the protection and use of cultural heritage sites. Any obviously redundant or contradictory requirements need to be eliminated. In some cases, a piece of cultural heritage may be crumbling right before our eyes, but formally, such imperfect regulations make it impossible to take prompt measures to save it.

I suggest developing a long-term programme for preserving Russia's cultural heritage sites, and I hope it will cover a 20-year period and include support measures for people, companies, and public associations willing to invest their work, time and money into restoring landmarks.

This year, we will test these mechanisms as part of a pilot project carried out by DOM.RF Development Institution covering five regions: the Trans-Baikal Territory, Novgorod, Ryazan, Smolensk and Tver regions. Our goal is to repair at least a thousand cultural heritage sites across the country by 2030, giving them a new lease on life so they can serve people and embellish our cities and village.

We will make sure to keep major culture-related projects running by continuing to fund them. We will undertake infrastructure upgrades for museums, theatres, libraries, clubs, arts schools and cinemas. Creative cinematic, online and social-media projects in education, awareness building, history and other areas will receive over 100 billion rubles over the next six years.

I suggest expanding the Pushkin Card programme, which enables school students and young people to access film screenings, museums, theatres and exhibitions for free, while offering cultural institutions an incentive to expand their operations and launch new projects, including by reaching out to the private sector. I am asking the Government to draft additional proposals to this effect.

In addition to this, we will launch a programme called the Rural Cultural Worker in 2025 along the same lines as the Rural Teacher and the Rural Doctor programmes. People keep raising this issue during our meetings. A specialist who moves to a rural area or a small town will be entitled to a non-recurring grant of 1 million rubles or twice as much, i.e., 2 million rubles, when moving to Russia's Far East, Donbass or Novorossiya.

There is another additional decision we need to work on and adopt. I am asking the Government to offer special lending terms for family mortgages in small towns, as well as in regions that do not build many blocks of flats or none at all. We need to do this as quickly as possible and define the main terms for these loans, including the down payment and interest rates. I am asking you to keep this on your radar; I look forward to your proposals.

Moving on, we will renew targeted mortgage lending programmes with a 2 percent interest rate for Russia's Far East, the Arctic, Donbass and Novorossiya. Special military operation participants and veterans will also be entitled to these subsidised loans.

We will provide separate support for the integrated development areas, the construction of residential areas replete with the infrastructure in the regions with inadequate levels of

socioeconomic development, where many of our usual proposals do not work. For these territories, we will set aside an additional 120 billion rubles.

In this regard, we are faced with another system-wide challenge. With the federal backup, many regions have significantly increased the pace of relocating residents from dilapidated blocks of flats. A total of 1.73 million people have moved into new flats over the past 16 years, and it is important not to lose this momentum in the next six years. I urge the Government to draft and launch a new programme for relocating residents from dilapidated and structurally unsafe buildings.

With regard to housing and utilities, we will step up the pace of updating the utilities infrastructure. A total of 4.5 trillion rubles, including private funds, will be allocated for these purposes until 2030.

We will continue to implement the Clean Water Project. Clean water is a top priority for many of our urban and rural areas. We are primarily talking about a reliable supply of high-quality drinking water.

Gas distribution is a separate subject. Our plans include providing this environmentally friendly fuel to towns and districts in Yakutia and Buryatia, as well as the Khabarovsk, Primorye and Trans-Baikal territories, the Murmansk and Amur regions, the Jewish Autonomous Area, Karelia, and the major Russian city of Krasnoyarsk. We will also supply LNG to the Kamchatka Territory and certain other regions.

Naturally, this will make it possible to expand the social gas supply programme which was already used to build the gas distribution infrastructure free of charge to the property lines of 1.1 million land plots. Applications continue to be accepted, and we are helping entitled groups of citizens, including the families of those in the special military operation, install gas lines within their plots of land.

On a separate note, there are horticultural non-commercial partnerships within the boundaries of many communities outfitted with gas grids. For years, sometimes from generation to generation, people have been tending to their land plots, and are now building houses suitable for year-round living, but they are unable to hook up to the grid because these partnerships are not included in the Social Gas Infrastructure Development programme.

This problem affects millions of households and must be resolved in the interests of our citizens, meaning that the social gas infrastructure development programme should be expanded to include them, and the grid should be extended to the boundaries of the partnerships.

Residents in remote northern and far eastern territories, where grid gas will not be available any time soon, will also be supported. Today, they heat their homes with coal or wood. Now, with the state subsidies, they will be able to purchase modern and domestically produced, environmentally safe equipment. The neediest families should be supported first. We will allocate an additional 32 billion rubles for these purposes.

We will develop public transport considering today's environmental standards and lower its average age. The Russian regions will receive an additional 40,000 buses, trolleybuses, trams, and electric buses by 2030. We will allocate an additional 150 billion rubles from the federal budget for this public transport renewal programme.

We will also replace the school bus fleet at a rate of at least 3,000 vehicles per year, which is especially important for small towns and rural areas. Both residents and heads of municipalities and regions are talking about this. This programme is indeed very important. Therefore, we will allocate an additional 66 billion rubles for the purchase of school buses. And, of course, they must either be entirely made in Russia or with a high degree of localisation.

As you know, we have managed to reduce harmful emissions in the atmosphere in 12 industrial centres of Russia as part of the Clean Air project, with 29 more cities having joined it last year. The volume of harmful emissions into the atmosphere across the country must be halved. We will move towards this goal step by step. A comprehensive environmental quality monitoring system will be created to assess the results.

Over the last five years, thousands of kilometres of rivers and banks have been cleaned, and dirty runoff into the Volga has been almost halved. Now I propose setting a goal of halving the pollution of Russia's main bodies of water.

Over the last five years, 128 large landfills in cities and 80 sites of accumulated environmental damage that were literally poisoning the lives of people in 53 regions of Russia have been cleared. The territories of the Krasny Bor landfill, the Baikal Pulp and Paper Mill and Usolye-Sibirskoye have been brought to a safe state.

In this regard, colleagues, I would like to emphasise that only the most urgent measures have been carried out so far at these sites, but that is far from the end. Under no circumstances should they be left in the condition as they are now. We must complete this work and create all the necessary infrastructure there.

Overall, we will continue clearing the most hazardous sites of accumulated environmental damage. In the next six years, at least 50 of these sites must be cleared.

It is necessary to create incentives for businesses, introduce green technologies, and switch to a circular economy. Moreover, we have in fact created an advanced waste management industry from scratch: 250 enterprises have been built to process and dispose of waste. The goal by 2030 is to sort all solid waste and everything that needs to be sorted and reuse at least a quarter of it. We will allocate additional financing for these projects, and together with businesses we will build about 400 new waste management facilities and eight eco-industrial parks.

What else do I want to say? At meetings in the Far East, Siberia and other regions, people spoke a lot about the need to preserve our wealth of forestland, deal with illegal logging and protect our forests. This issue hugely resonates with the public. It is important to almost every person. All of us are pooling efforts here and the situation is gradually changing.

A very important milestone – since 2021, Russia has been restoring more forestland than it clears. I would like to thank all the volunteers, school and university students and everyone who planted trees and took part in environmental activities, and, of course, businesses that supported such projects. We will certainly continue restoring forests, parks and gardens, including those surrounding metropolitan areas and industrial centres.

I suggest making a separate decision on increasing salaries of specialists engaged in the forest industry, meteorology and environmental protection – all those dealing with the most important issues of environmental sustainability. We must admit frankly that they are doing vital work but their pay is very modest.

To support civil environmental protection initiatives, I believe it is necessary to establish a fund for ecological and environmental projects. It will start off with grants totaling one billion rubles a year.

We will continue working to preserve specially protected natural areas, as well as protect and restore populations of rare and endangered species of flora and fauna. I suggest considering the opening of a network of centres for rehabilitating injured and confiscated wild animals.

By 2030, we will create infrastructure of environmental tourism in all national parks of the country, including eco-trails and tourist hiking routes, weekend tours for schoolchildren, outdoor recreation areas, museums and visit centres.

We will build modern safe facilities near bodies of water as well, including Lake Baikal. A year-round resort will open there by 2030. It is important to strictly adhere to the zero

pollution principle, that is, to ensure that no waste or untreated sewage of any kind enters the lake. The construction of the Baikal resort will be part of the large project of the Five Seas.

Modern hotel complexes will also appear on the coasts of the Caspian Sea, the Baltic Sea, the Sea of Azov, the Black Sea and the Sea of Japan. This project alone will make it possible to add another 10 million tourists a year.

Tourism numbers are expected to practically double to 140 million people a year by 2030 in the country as a whole, considering the dynamic development of such tourist centres as Altai, Kamchatka, Kuzbass, the North Caucasus, Karelia and the Russian North. Importantly, the contribution of tourism to Russia's GDP will also double to five percent. We will soon draft additional decisions on this issue.

Transport infrastructure is crucial for the development of tourism and the region as a whole. High-speed auto traffic between Moscow and Kazan has already opened; this year, we are going to extend the route to Yekaterinburg, and next year, to Tyumen. In the future, a modern and safe transport artery will cross the entire country to Vladivostok.

Also, more than 50 city bypass highways should be built in Russia in the next six years. Another significant road project is certainly the Dzhubga-Sochi motorway. It will cut travel time from the M-4 Don to Sochi by three quarters – up to an hour and a half – and will promote Black Sea coast development.

I must say this at the outset – I have reached an agreement with the Government, and I want to say this publicly – that this is a complex and very capital-intensive project. It includes many tunnels and bridges; it is an expensive project. Nevertheless, I would like to ask the Government to develop a funding arrangement for it. Work it out.

We have already repaired Russia's federal roads and almost 85 percent of roads in major metropolitan areas. It is essential that we keep this up. At the same time, in the coming years, we will place special emphasis on the improvement of regional roads.

Air travel should become more affordable. We need to increase Russians' so-called air mobility. By 2030, air service volumes in Russia should increase 50 percent compared to last year.

To this end, we plan to expedite the development of intra- and interregional air travel. In this regard, the Government has very specific instructions: to modernise the infrastructure of at least 75 airports, which is more than a third of Russia's airports, over the next six years, allocating at least 250 billion rubles in direct budget financing for this purpose.

The air fleets of our airlines definitely need upgrades by adding our own Russian-made aircraft. These new planes must meet all modern requirements for quality, convenience and safety, which is a challenging task. We used to buy too many planes abroad instead of developing our own domestic production.

Advanced Russian developments in mechanical engineering, construction, communications and digital systems will also be highly needed in building high-speed railways. I would like to say a few words on this.

The first high-speed rail line between Moscow and St Petersburg will pass through Tver and our ancient capital, Veliky Novgorod. Later, we will build similar lines to Kazan and the Urals, to Rostov-on-Don, to the Black Sea coast, to Minsk, our fraternal Belarus, and other popular destinations.

The all-out modernisation of the Central Transport Hub will continue. The Moscow Central Diameters, the new surface metro lines will become part of a network connecting the Moscow Region with the Yaroslavl, Tver, Kaluga, Vladimir and other regions by modern high-speed routes.

It is also imperative to upgrade the network of major inland waterways. This should ensure additional economic effects with regard to tourism, industry, as well as the development of

certain sensitive regions that are very important for us, including the regions of the Far North.

What can I add to this? Modern infrastructure offers added value and increases market capitalisation for all national assets and regions serving transit tourist flows, while also helping develop manufacturing and agricultural facilities and encouraging people to build single-family homes for their households and create a better living environment for them. This also means new business opportunities, including on foreign markets.

In this context, there is a special matter we discussed during one of the meetings I had. I am talking about the waiting times at border checkpoints. This has become an urgent matter in Russia's Far East. Customs clearance must take 19 minutes according to our standards, but in reality truck drivers usually have to wait for hours to cross the border.

Our colleagues from the Ministry of Transport have a specific objective to reduce customs clearance times for freight transport on the border so that it does not exceed 10 minutes. The latest technological solutions can make this happen.

These requirements are also essential for the North-South transport corridor to be effective. This route will link Russia to countries in the Middle East and Asia, and will rely on motorways, as well as seamless rail connections, from our ports in the Baltic and Barents seas all the way to the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean. We will also increase the carrying capacity of our southbound railways to make better use of our ports in the Azov and Black seas.

The effort to expand the Eastern Operating Domain covers the Baikal-Amur Mainline and the Trans-Siberian Railway. We are about to launch the third stage. We slacked off at one point, if you will excuse this expression. In fact, we failed to act when we should have, but that's okay – we now have to catch up, and catch up we will. These two railways will increase their annual throughput capacity from 173 to 210 million tonnes by 2030. At the same time, there will be an effort to expand the Vanino and the Sovetskaya Gavan ports.

Northern Sea Route development deserves special attention. We invite foreign logistics companies and foreign countries to use this global transport corridor. Last year, freight volumes along this route reached 36 million tonnes. Colleagues, I would like to draw your attention to the fact that this exceeds the Soviet-era maximum five times over. We will make the Northern Sea Route operational year-round and will expand our northern ports, including the Murmansk transport hub. This includes an effort to expand our Arctic fleet, of course.

The Severny Polyus (North Pole), a unique research icebreaking platform, sailed last year. This year, the Baltic Shipyard started building the Leningrad, a new nuclear icebreaker. Next year, we will start building the Stalingrad, which belongs to the same class of ships. As for the Zvezda Shipyard in Russia's Far East, it is building the Lider (Leader), a new-generation icebreaker that will have double the power of its predecessors.

Russia's shipyards will upgrade much of our commercial fleet, including tankers, gas carriers and container ships. This effort is expected to enable Russian businesses to streamline their trade operations considering the changing logistics environment and radical shifts in the global economy.

Fellow citizens, friends,

I would like to make special mention of something. I meet regularly with participants in the special military operation, including career military personnel and volunteers, as well as people of civilian professions who were mobilised for military service. All of them took up arms and rose in defence of our Motherland.

You know, I look at these courageous men, sometimes very young men and, without exaggeration, I can say that my heart overflows with pride for our people, our nation and these people in particular. Without a doubt, people like them will not back down, fail or betray.

They should take leading positions in the system of education and upbringing of young people, in public associations, state-run companies and privately held businesses, federal and municipal administration. They should head regions and enterprises, as well as major national projects. Some of these heroes and patriots are quite low-key and reserved in everyday life. They do not brag about their accomplishments, or talk big. But at pivotal moments in history, such people come to the fore and take responsibility. People who think about the country and live as one with it can be entrusted with the future of Russia.

You know that the word "elite" has lost much of its credibility. Those who have done nothing for society and consider themselves a caste endowed with special rights and privileges – especially those who took advantage of all kinds of economic processes in the 1990s to line their pockets – are definitely not the elite. To reiterate, those who serve Russia, hard workers and military, reliable, trustworthy people who have proven their loyalty to Russia by deeds, in a word, dignified people are the genuine elite.

In this regard, I would like to announce a new decision which, I believe, is important. Starting tomorrow, March 1, 2024, the veterans of the special military operations, as well as soldiers and officers who are currently fighting in active units, will be able to apply to be in the first class of a special personnel training programme. Let us call it Time of Heroes. Truth be told, this idea came to me when I met with the St Petersburg students who served in the special military operation. This programme will be built according to the standards of our best projects, namely, the Higher School of Public Administration, also known as the "school of governors," and the Leaders of Russia contest. Their graduates tend to reach high positions in many spheres, and even become ministers and heads of regions.

Active military members and veterans with university degrees and managerial experience will be welcome to enroll, regardless of their rank or position. What matters is that those individuals have shown their best qualities, have shown that they know how to lead their comrades.

The course of study will begin in the coming months. The first cohort of participants will be mentored by senior officials from the Government, the Presidential Executive Office, federal ministries and agencies, heads of regions and our largest companies. In the future, we will expand such personnel training programmes, launch management courses at the Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration, and I deem it expedient to raise the status of the Academy at the legislative level.

In addition, veterans and participants of the special military operation will have priority entitlement to join higher education programmes in civilian specialties at our leading universities.

I would like to ask the Defence Ministry and all unit commanders to support their soldiers and officers' interest in joining the new personnel training programme, to give them the opportunity to apply and to physically attend classes. I would like to note that the special military operation participants, including privates, sergeants and combat officers, are already the backbone of our Armed Forces. And, as I have said, those who intend to continue their military careers will receive priority promotion, enrollment in command courses, military schools and academies.

Friends,

Independence, self-sufficiency and sovereignty must be proven and reaffirmed every day. This is our responsibility for Russia's present and future, something no else can do but us. This is about our Motherland, the Motherland of our ancestors, and no one will ever need it and treasure it the way we do – except our descendants, to whom we must pass on a strong and prosperous country.

Over the past few years, we have successfully built a management system, and implemented our national projects relying on large amounts of data and modern digital technologies. This has enabled us to increase efficiency, manage risks, build on the entire amount of available

information, and continuously fine-tune our projects and programmes while relying on feedback from our people.

I would like to thank my colleagues from the Government, agencies and regions that were meticulously building this system all these years – during the pandemic and in the face of the sanctions aggression against Russia. I know that this was a challenging and difficult job, but the main point is that it is already paying off. We are seeing this in the results.

We will continue following precisely this logic. It is necessary to endorse and coordinate with each other all the national projects I spoke about today. I would like to emphasise again that these are not projects of separate departments. They should work for common system-wide objectives and for our national development goals. That said, I would like to ask the Russian Popular Front to continue monitoring the implementation of decisions at all levels of government.

I would like to stress that the main result of our programmes is measured not in tonnes, kilometres or money spent. The main thing is that people see changes for the better in their life. The scale of historical challenges facing Russia requires extremely clear, coordinated work of the state, civil society and the business community.

I consider it necessary to not only prepare a draft budget for the next three years but also to plan all major spending and investment further on, up to 2030. In other words, we must draft a perspective six-year plan for our national development that we will definitely supplement with new initiatives. Naturally, life will make its own adjustments to it.

We are mapping out long-term plans despite this complicated period, despite the current trials and difficulties. The programme that I set out in the address today is based on facts and tackles fundamental matters. This is a programme of a strong sovereign country looking to the future with confidence. We have both resources and enormous opportunities to achieve the goals we set ourselves.

But now I will emphasise the main thing. Today, making good on all these plans directly depends on our soldiers, officers and volunteers – all military personnel that are now fighting at the front. It depends on the courage and resolve of our comrades-in-arms that are defending the Motherland, going on the offensive, moving forward under fire and sacrificing themselves for the sake of us, for the sake of the Fatherland. It is our fighters that are creating today the absolutely essential conditions for the future of the country and its development.

You have our deepest respect, guys.

I would like to thank all of you, colleagues, and all citizens of Russia for their solidarity and reliability. We are one big family; we stand together and for this reason we will do everything we plan and desire and dream.

I have faith in our victories, successes and the future of Russia!

Thank you.

(National Anthem of the Russian Federation plays.)