

We are today celebrating the thirty-eighth anniversary of India's Independence. On this occasion, I extend my greetings to all citizens, in every village and town, to our farmers and workers, to our mothers and sisters, to the children of India, to menfolk, to our armed forces and to all Indians living abroad.

Thirty-eight years ago, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru for the first time unfurled the tricolour at this very Red Fort. Indiraji should have been here today but she has been snatched away from us. The task has fallen on me. I did not see the struggle for Independence. When the tricolour was unfurled here for the first time, I was only three years old. Today, two-thirds of the people of India are like me, who have not participated in the country's struggle for Independence. A new generation has come to the fore. The struggle for Independence is as much our inheritance as the Himalayas, the Ganges, the Plateau of Deccan, Ajanta, Taj Mahal and Mahabalipuram, the arts, philosophy and science of India.

Who is not filled with pride when thinking of the Buddha, Kabir, Nanak and Gandhiji? We are filled with pride when we think of the sacrifices by our freedom fighters who trailed a new path of truth and non-violence during our freedom struggle.

We have achieved considerable progress in the last 38 years. During these years, we have been able to lift nearly 63 percent of our population above the poverty line. A new middle class has emerged. We have become self-sufficient in foodgrains. The entire world wonders at the way we have been able to mould and advance our science and technology, our independent foreign policy, our democracy, liberty and secularism. And we have been able to achieve this despite the three or four wars we had to face, preserving all the time the unity and integrity of India. We have been able to do it because we were shown the right path by Gandhiji, Panditji and Indiraji. The journey, however, is still very long and difficult. We have to battle with poverty and eradicate it altogether. This is the only path for us to follow and we have to eliminate poverty with all the strength at our command.

How was it that India could achieve all this while many other developing countries have fallen on the wayside, embroiled in their own difficulties? We could do it because we took recourse to science and technology for the amelioration of poverty. We saw to it that science and technology were applied in the right manner. The initiative was taken by Panditji, by constructing huge dams, setting up large steel plants and encouraging the promotion of science. He focussed his attention on the poor and the farmers of India. The foundation laid by Panditji enabled the farmers to treble their production with the help of science and technology. This saved our confidence.

Indiraji gave a new impetus to the eradication of poverty. In the last few years, the percentage of people brought above the poverty line has gone up from 49 to 63. In the last few weeks I have travelled over various parts of the country. I have gone to tribal districts and villages and visited hutments of the Harijans. I have travelled from the hills to the desert of Rajasthan. The problems of the poor were identical. In the cities too, I have visited the hutments of the poor. The purpose of all this was to find how we could improve our programmes and streamline the administration to ensure that the poor people of India are able to receive full benefits from these programmes.

The path we have followed is the same which was shown to us by Panditji to take science and technology to the hearths and homes of the poorest of the poor. We are considering how this objective can be achieved and how science and technology can be utilised to provide the maximum benefit to the poor. For instance, we do not find a drop of water in the deserts of Rajasthan. We can, however, use satellite pictures to locate underground water. Similarly, we can provide better quality seeds to the farmers to increase production. We would like to see that power, water and other inputs reach

farmers and workers to help increase production and make the country stronger. The country will forge ahead only when rural India is able to march forward. We should devote our full energy for the uplift of rural India.

We must see that regional imbalances in the growth of various parts of the country are removed and all the States progress evenly. We shall ensure that all citizens of the country get full opportunity to contribute their might towards India's progress. It is towards this end that we have formulated the Seventh Plan which aims not only at economic development but the total advancement and strengthening of Indian society. The framework of this Plan will be shortly before you. We hope that the country will progress substantially under the Plan and that in these five years, we shall march ahead at a pace at which India has never marched before.

There is no change in our principles. Following the path shown to us by Gandhiji and Panditji, we want the development process to reach every nook and corner of our country. Gandhiji talked of Swadeshi. Thirty eight years ago, not even a needle was made in India. Swadeshi, then, meant only Khadi. Panditji opened the vistas of science and technology for us and India moved ahead. Today, when we talk of Swadeshi, we do not mean Khadi alone. We mean indigenous industry, indigenous computer and power from indigenous atomic energy sources. The meaning of Swadeshi has undergone a sea-change in the last 38 years and it goes to prove how much progress India has made. This is what we are proud of.

However much we might progress and develop economically, I would think that we have not really progressed if, in the process we lose our inheritance, our traditions, our culture and civilisation. We have to see that along with economic development, we develop and strengthen our character. It is for this purpose that during this very month we shall present to you a new format of education which we hope will bring about new awareness in every corner and every village country and will provide a new impetus to the country's progress. We have to see that human development takes place with full vigour all over the country.

There are obstacles in our way, the biggest being internal dissensions based on religion, caste, language or region. We must make

sure that these dissensions do not acquire extremist dimensions. We have also to ensure that such disputes weaken the foundations of our democracy. They weaken the coun and retard its progress.

Many people have lost their lives due to extremist activities. Gandhiii lost his life 38 years ago and Indiraji only ten months ago. Communal conflicts have done immense harm to the country and we have to root out communalism from the midst of us all. They have taken toll of not only Gandhiji and Indiraji but have harmed every one in the country. Whenever big leaders like Gandhiji and Indiraji die, its impact is felt all over the world. Indira Gandhi was not the leader of India alone. The whole world recognised her as a leader of the poor. There have been few leaders who were able to make such a name for themselves in the world. Today the country has to make a pledge to end communal differences and raise it voice against terrorism. We have to make sure that we use our energies for creating an atmosphere in which we can live like brothers.

You thrust a responsibility on me 41 weeks ago. In these 41 weeks, we have done many things to redeem our pledges. The biggest challenge confronting us was to maintain the unity and integrity of India. Ten months ago, the world was watching whether India would remain united or disintegrate into pieces. Today, that question just does not arise. Today India has emerged before the world as a very strong country. We had the problem of terrorism in Punjab. We took steps and, a few weeks ago, an agreement was signed. We hope that complete peace will be restored in Punjab and the State will make rapid progress on the road to development. The tension that existed has eased and the country can now move rapidly ahead.

The other problem was of Assam. Negotiations were going on for many years but a solution had eluded us. I am happy to tell you that last night, or rather today at 2.45 a.m., an agreement was signed between the Assam students and the Government of India. We hope that with the signing of this agreement, another element of tension will be removed and the country will be able to address itself to rapid development.

During the elections, we had promised to wage a battle against corruption. We have taken a couple of steps and are in the process of taking a third one in this direction. First of all, we brought the anti-defection bill, got it passed and implemented it, removing thereby a great infirmity from our politics. Secondly, we allowed political parties to accept donations. This will minimise corruption. We are now ready to take the third step and introduce the Lokpal bill. We hope this bill will be presented soon and a major cause of complaint will be removed.

We had also promised to cleanse the Ganga. The purity of Ganga had a special significance for every Indian heart. But the Ganga is getting polluted because we are dumping a great lot of rubbish into it. We are taking firm and swift action to cleanse the Ganga. Likewise, we have vast expanses of waste land in the country. We are going to plant crores of trees in the waste lands to be able to provide firewood for the poor and fodder for cattle. Recently, we have modified our textile policy. In restructuring this policy, our endeavour is to see that our weavers are able to sell more and earn larger profits.

We had also pledged to strive for peace in our neighbourhood. We initiated talks with Sri Lanka and these talks are being continued today in Bhutan. We hope that just as we have been able to resolve the problem of Punjab and Assam, they will also be able to bring about peace in Sri Lanka. This will lead to an easing of tension in the South and our people will be less worried. We are trying to improve further our friendly relations with Bhutan, Nepal and China. We are also talking to Pakistan and have made some progress. However, there is one major hurdle in our way. Their Atomic Energy Programme makes us feel that Pakistan is moving towards developing an atomic bomb. If there is to be complete friendship and confidence between our two countries, Pakistan should reconsider this programme.

In the last few months I went to the Soviet Union and to the United States of America and held the Indian Flag higher. Today, every citizen of India can stand upright and look the world in the eye. India is independent

in every respect and strong and cannot be subjected to any pressure.

In certain parts of the world, the struggle for freedom started along with the freedom struggle launched by Congress. When Congress won freedom, many countries of Africa and Asia were able to gain their independence. But in South Africa, where Gandhiji had first launched his movement, the people are still enslaved and oppressed. We have extended our full support to our brothers and sisters in South Africa who are struggling for their independence. We wish that other countries too, especially the developed countries, will extend similar support to them. We must see that slavery, especially the kind of slavery practised in South Africa, is ended at the earliest.

All our pledges and all the measures we might take will be nullified if we fail to remove poverty in our country. So, we are focussing our special attention to poverty alleviation programmes. Wherever there are loopholes, we are trying to plug them and implement our programmes more vigorously. Where extra help is needed we are ready to give it. We are reviewing these programmes and will shortly bring forth a modified Programme structured in a manner that will ensure greater benefits to the poor and lesser financial involvement of the administration. We hope that the 63 percent lifted above the poverty line will grow into a larger proportion rapidly in the coming years so that we are really able to proclaim to the world that poverty has been eradicated from India.

Today, on August 15, every citizen of the country should pledge to dedicate his life for strengthening the nation and the values it stands for. Hand in hand let us move forward faster to achieve our goals. Once again I extend my greetings to you on our Independence Day.