

My congratulations to you on Independence Day today. The monsoon has been very good this year. I want to congratulate all our farmers, farm labourers, brothers and sisters, because after many years we have had such a monsoon.

On this day, we have to think of the future and also look back. On the one hand, we have to see where we have to take the country, how we have to carry our people forward, and on the other hand, we have to ponder over the difficulties we have emerged out of, and how we can improve things in future.

When we look back over the last four years, one thing that we notice is the economic improvement in the country. We have to recall that the monsoon was very bad in 1984 and 1985. Then there was drought in 1986 and last year's drought was the worst in living memory. Yet, the country steadily moved forward.

Last year, we fought the drought with all our strength. From Delhi, from the Centre, we paid early attention to it and initiated strong measures. Our effort was to see that as far as the drought was concerned we should not bring politics into it and that our attention should be focussed on the people who were suffering under drought and needed relief. We devoted last year to this and our entire attention was concentrated on those people. India came out of this drought and the pace of our development did not halt, although it slowed down a bit. We did move forward and with strength.

The world was a witness to how India faced the drought and it realised that India had become a strong country capable of facing major calamities. The world also realised that there is nothing that can suppress India or stop it from forging ahead.

I want to congratulate all those who put their shoulders to the job of meeting the challenge of the drought- whether they were in politics, administration or in any voluntary organisation. Above all, I would like to congratulate our farmers and farm labourers who faced the drought with determination. As I said, even though the country was reeling under drought, its pace of development could not be halted. The country moved

ahead even under those conditions. The performance of our infrastructure was very good. Likewise, the process of industrialisation continued at a fast pace and we did not allow it to falter.

For the first time, the country came out of such a difficult period and the pace of development did not suffer. For the first time, we did not go to others with a begging bowl. That we were able to achieve this is a matter of great pride. We were able to do it because of the work done by Panditji and Indiraji during the last 40 years- the result of which we see today. Even while passing through difficult times, there was no slackening of attention we devoted to the poor. We reinforced our programmes of poverty alleviation, programmes for women, for development of children and for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. We worked for the rapid and effective implementation of these programmes. Never before have so much of resources been invested in poverty alleviation programmes as had been done during these years.

Even so, sometimes certain painful incidents occur. A few days back, a major incident occurred in Jehanabad. It brought down the prestige of the entire country. Our endeavour will be to prevent recurrence of such incidents. I am aware that our laws have their lacunae and we are unable to take the kind of action we would like to. If need be, we will change the laws to ensure that such incidents are not repeated and that the guilty are swiftly and suitably punished. Similarly, we have to ensure that our minorities get full opportunity to progress and make their contribution to nation building. Our weaker sections also require help and we will provide it to them. We have to ensure that the backward classes in our country are strengthened and that they get an opportunity to progress.

Our economic position has become strong and, during these years, we have also strengthened the country politically. You may recall how the country was placed three-and-a-half years ago in November 1984. You will recall that a dark cloud hung over it and the single question that agitated the hearts and minds of the people was- what will happen to the country; will India remain united or disintegrate? Indiraji had been assassinated,

there were riots in Delhi, the conditions in Punjab were bad, there were agitations in Assam and Mizoram, terrorism stalked Tripura and a new agitation had started in the Darjeeling hills of West Bengal. In the south, the people were concerned because of the serious Tamil problem in Sri Lanka.

When we look around us today, we find a great improvement. There has been an Accord with Sri Lanka which we hope will soon be fully implemented. Meanwhile, the concern among the people in South India has been removed. Peace has come to Darjeeling following an agreement. There has been a settlement in Tripura bringing terrorism to an end. Peace has been restored in Mizoram and also in Assam. There have been changes in the Punjab situation though not to the desired extent. When we compare the Punjab of 1984 with the Punjab of 1988, we see the difference. The same old feelings are no longer there. Today the administration is firmly moving ahead together with the people of Punjab who have stood up firmly for the country and everyone in Punjab is determinedly facing the challenge of extremism and terrorism.

We have demonstrated that if we want we can act firmly and show a firm hand. The Operation "Black Thunder" showed to all of us and to the whole world that India's security forces can act firmly and with great discipline. It also proved that the terrorists are mere terrorists and that religion finds no place in their hearts. The kind of things they did in that holy place, have perhaps never before been indulged in in any sacred place in the country. We had never witnessed such desecration of a holy place and, I hope, we never have to see such a thing in future.

We are taking swift action to secure our borders to prevent infiltration and control terrorists. We regret that terrorists are still getting help from across the border. We hope that those helping the terrorists will soon realise the seriousness of their mistake. We would not like to take any action that may force them to repent later.

During these years, we have totally changed the country's spirit. The depressing dark clouds of 1984 prevail no more. Today, people find a strong country forging steadily ahead with pride. Today, no one raises the

question of disintegration of the country because India has proved to the world that it is a power which cannot be weakened by anyone.

But, there is a weakness which we have to completely eliminate. We have to destroy the communal forces. We have to ensure that secularism is strengthened and that no one mixes religion with politics. If a law is required or any other action is called for, we will do that. But we will fight the communal forces with all our strength. Our endeavour will be to unite all those who want to fight communalism and carry them together to fight these forces. It is our constant endeavour that the spirit of amity among religions prevailing in India, is not only maintained but strengthened.

We have also given a great deal of attention to India's security. Today, our armed forces are stronger than ever before. We are today capable of facing aggression from any side. This was never the case earlier. We have provided a great deal of impetus to defence research and development and to technology and science. For the first time, our defence technology has forged ahead and is now comparable to that of the advanced countries. In many areas we are on a level with them and we hope that in the coming years we will strongly move ahead in this direction and show to the world that India can fully stand on its own feet and can totally face any challenge. No one can deviate us from our path.

On this day, I would like to congratulate my brothers and sisters in the armed forces for their discipline, their perseverance and for their determination. It is due to their strength that we sleep peacefully every night.

In the same manner, we have taken the prestige of India to great heights in the world during these years. We desire friendship with all. We desire that the whole world is enveloped in the spirit of humanism and unity so that we are able to devote ourselves to poverty alleviation and to improving the lot of the weaker sections.

We wish that the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi- the ideals of ahimsa and tolerance- spread throughout the world. We have made every endeavour to propagate these principles to every corner of the world. Through the

Non-aligned Movement, we have carried this spirit to 101 nations of the world. We have moved even farther to carry this spirit even to those countries which did not subscribe to these principles. These principles have also made an impact on the great powers. We hope to move ahead on this path with greater determination and create in the world a new environment of peace, tolerance, unity of mankind and progress. This was the path shown to us by Pt. Nehru and by Indiraji. We will not deviate from this path and will move ahead with determination.

We desire friendship with all our neighbouring countries. We wish that all of us co-operate to work for the development of our peoples. We initiated this co-operation through the SAARC and the movement has progressed well. There are still many problems and the path is not easy, but the difficulties are not of our making. We have friendship in our hearts and we have tolerance. We want our region to be strong, and we will strive hard to this end.

In our neighbourhood, a conflict has been going on in Afghanistan. We are happy that an agreement has been reached and that peace will be restored there. It is, however, essential that the Agreement reached in Geneva is implemented and that there is no deviation from it. If the Agreement fails, it will lead to the weakening of the entire region. We hope that all the concerned parties will observe the Geneva Agreement.

There is today only one part of the globe- South Africa- where racial discrimination is still practised. India, even before Independence, came out against apartheid, under the leadership of Gandhiji and later under Jawaharlal Nehru. Even today, we are raising our voice with all our strength to end apartheid. We will not rest till apartheid is ended, till slavery is banished from the world.

Similarly, India is also firmly supporting the Palestinian movement. We would like an agreement to be reached so that Palestinians find a home and return to their motherland. We want peace to return to that part of the world.

If poverty has to be removed and if weaker nations have to progress,

then it is essential to have nuclear disarmament. No country in the world has raised its voice in favour of nuclear disarmament as strongly as India. For the first time, an Action Plan was presented to the United Nations which would lead to disarmament and peace throughout the world. For the first time we presented a programme to secure everyone's co-operation. We hope that nations will soon veer round and accept our plan. We know that it cannot be achieved quickly. This is not an easy path.

About 40 years ago, Jawaharlal Nehru had framed a new foreign policy based on the principles enunciated by Gandhiji. About 30 years ago Panditji had raised the flag of Non-alignment. Today we find that for the first time there has been some action on Disarmament and on Non-alignment. Thirty to thirty-five years after Jawaharlal Nehru had raised the question of Disarmament, an agreement has been reached on destroying nuclear weapons. We know that it is not an easy path. Nor will we be able to complete the course quickly. But we realise that if there has to be peace in the world and if countries like India have to progress and become strong, and above all if the poor peoples of the world have to be uplifted, then we have to cease spending funds on weapons and divert those resources to eradicate poverty and uplift humanity. We are moving firmly in this direction and we will not allow any infirmity to creep in.

India's stock has risen high in the world. The country has earned recognition and has participated in many major world decisions. We hope that in the coming years also India will continue to play its role in world affairs. We will carry the traditional spirit of India to the entire world, because only then will we be able to carve out the right path and reach the principles and ideology of Gandhiji to all corners of the world.

Today, on 15th August, we have to look to the future. We have to recognise the challenges before the country. There are many challenges but if I were to list them, I would rate poverty and unemployment as the main challenges, followed by the task to make our country great and to take it to the summit of glory where it was before the country was enslaved. We have to do a lot to remove poverty. We have initiated many

programmes, but a lot more has to be done. If we have to remove poverty and provide employment, we have first to look at our villages. When we look at rural India, we have to look at the farmers and farm labourers who face enormous difficulties. Our effort is that, before anything else, we should help this sector to progress. If we really have to develop agriculture, we have to pay serious attention to land reforms. If land reforms are not implemented particularly in eastern India, the green revolution will not be able to reach there. We will look at this problem seriously and try to resolve it.

We have found that over the years we had the same agricultural plan for farmers of the plains, for the hills, for desert areas and the south. We have changed all that. We have divided the country into 15-16 agro-climatic zones. We are now minutely examining the problems that the farmers face- what kind of soil they have, what are their irrigation needs, how much fertiliser and the seeds they require and the crops they should sow. For the first time we are examining all this minutely. We hope that this year our agricultural sector makes fast progress. We are making every effort to raise our level of production and return to the targets we fixed three years ago, because only then shall we be able to help our farmers and farm labourers.

We are also faced with another enormous problem. During the last 40-50 years our population has increased tremendously. While a lot of development has taken place, we find that where three-four persons subsisted on a bigha of land, there are 30-40 persons living off the same land now. Agricultural land has been utilised for constructing roads, hospitals, schools and other institutions. A lot development has taken place but in the process land has become scarce. What we have to think about is how many people can subsist on land. We have also to consider how others can be provided employment. What is most essential is that employment has to be provided in the village itself. We have to remove unemployment and we have to begin with the villages. This is what we are striving to do. We have to see how value addition to the farmer's produce can take place; that the produce is processed, sells better and that the

farmer gets a good price. We have to establish small processing plants. Our endeavour would be to introduce the produce of Indian farmers to the whole world and export our fruit, vegetables and foodgrains. We have, in the Government, given special attention to this. We hope that we will be able to achieve rapid development especially in the backward and rural areas.

At the same time, we have also to ensure faster industrialisation because without it employment cannot be generated and unemployment cannot be removed. We have to identify new areas of employment. The world is changing. A lot of changes have taken place in industry as also in the life-styles. We have to keep pace with it and to find out new areas of employment. We have moved fast in this direction also and hope that in the coming months and years we will find a sea-change in the country, so that the country gets stronger. Our poor and our youth will find employment and we will be able to move rapidly ahead.

There is a great drawback that we have not been able to overcome. I receive many complaints that our programmes do not fully reach the grassroots level in rural areas. We have to think why this happens. I had had many meetings and debated the matter for hours. It then became clear that unless we made our Panchayati Raj institutions stronger and handed over responsibility to the people down below, nothing could be achieved. Gandhiji had said this very clearly. He had said that his concept of Swaraj did not mean that power should concentrate in the hands of a few. Rather it meant that the people should have the capability to check misuse of power. This is what we also want to do. If it requires a change in the law or even an amendment of the Constitution, we will certainly do it and leave no lacunae. We will see that power vests in the hands of the people because we know that this is the only way to ensure the success of our programmes and to take them to the masses.

When we look towards the future, our thoughts turn to our nation and our country. We have to consider what kind of India we would like to make. We shall remove poverty and we shall eliminate unemployment, but in what



images shall we mould our country? Our endeavour should be to take the country to the heights to which it belonged about 250-300 years ago, before people from different corners of the world set out to discover India. We shall be able to achieve this only when we strengthen the unity and integrity of India and battle with all those who wish to weaken the country. India will be strong only when every part of the nation is strong. India will remain strong only when the Centre remains strong. We will see at no one is able to weaken the Centre and that the Centre remains strong. We together carry on our shoulders the country's heritage. All of us are carrying forward the traditions of Gandhiji, Jawaharlal Nehru and Indiraji. We have to ensure that we follow their principles and their ideas. At the same time, we have to remember that it is we who have to find answers to the problems facing us today. We will not be able to find the answers in history. We have to carve out our own path with courage and determination. We have to remember that, if need be, we will have to make sacrifices. Gandhiji made the sacrifice, Panditji made sacrifices and Indiraji sacrificed herself. All of us should be ready for whatever sacrifices are to be made. I am also ready to make sacrifices to make the country strong, to make it go forward, to take it to the pinnacle and make a place for itself in the world.

Let all of us pledge today that we will eradicate poverty and unemployment from the country, make India great and be ready for whatever sacrifices are required. Today, on 15th August, I pledge from the ramparts of the Red Fort that together we will restore India to its glory.