

A birth anniversary, be it of an individual or of a country, is an auspicious occasion and a day of rejoicing. All of us celebrate it, be it here or in our homes. In earlier years, the radio carried the voice from here to the other parts of the country. Last year, however, television began carrying the images from here to a few big cities. But today television pictures of this ceremony will reach many small towns also, marking the beginning of the programme to reach television to 70 percent area of the country. This is how all progress takes place- gradually.

It is a day when we recall our struggle for independence. We remember Mahatma Gandhi, his other colleagues and disciples and many others about whom you must have read. But there were hundreds and thousands of other brave freedom fighters who also sacrificed everything. A few thousand of them fortunately are still with us. We remember them all and when we remember them, we also ponder as to what lesson we should learn from their sacrifices.

There are some who say that whichever Prime Minister spoke from the Red Fort, repeated the same thing every year. What a strange thing to say! The ideals that we set for ourselves, the things that build up character and raise the morale of the people, concern for the security, progress and development of the country- are not all these duties incumbent on us today? Can our basic thinking ever get outdated? Should we not remember these duties each year, indeed each day! And repeat them to ourselves, in our hearts and minds? This is true not only of our country, it is true of all countries. This is not the occasion to talk at great length about our achievements, of the big things that have been done for raising the standard of living of the common people. But the record is there for everyone to see. Our own countrymen, as also people of other countries, know about it and you must have read how the leaders of big countries have been talking about it. It does not mean, however, that our task has been completed. It also does not mean that we have turned all our aspirations into reality. But it does mean that we have progressed along the path shown to us by our great leaders and that we continue to advance

despite all difficulties and dangers and despite the fact that at times we have also faltered. Perhaps many of the difficulties we face today are due to this fact.

Once enslaved, poor, oppressed and timid, this country is today able to hold its head high. You look at the achievements. Some of them are really big. We have increased power generation. Earlier, power was available in a mere 3,000 cities and towns, and hardly any villages. Today, 3 lakh villages have been electrified and, of course, power is available in all towns. This is only a small example of what has indeed happened. I have already mentioned about television. You also know how we have sent our own satellites into space and how we can utilize them for the benefit of the farmers and others. At Kalpakkam, near Madras, our engineers, with wholly indigenous know-how, have set up an atomic power plant. In another two months we plan to send another satellite into space. All these are big steps which have relevance to our life, to the lives of the working class and students and also the everyday lives of housewives. Since we met here last, the Asian Games were organized in this city. It was a show of young people. That was followed by the Nonaligned Summit, which was an indication of India's capabilities, and the whole world had occasion witness it.

I also take this opportunity to congratulate our young sportsmen who have kept the country's head high. I specially want to congratulate our cricket team for winning the World Cup recently. Those young men remind us of the brave youth whose courage shone through during our freedom struggle.

But do not imagine that other young men, our children, our farmers and our workers, don't deserve congratulations. All of them sweat hard in their given field of activity and step by step they are carrying India forward. I congratulate them all. We do not know their names, we have not seen them, nor can we identify them. Yet, they are the foundation of India- the poor belonging to the Scheduled Castes, the tribals and the backward communities. I myself do not believe in caste and I would wish that it is

rooted out from our country. We should all consider ourselves one. We are equal citizens of a great country.

Today, when we look at our achievements, we should also cast a glance at our shortcomings. What are the things that have held us back and what are the stumbling blocks which do not let us progress fast enough if we were to learn a lesson from the freedom struggle, we would find that only unity and discipline lead to success. We find today that intentionally or unintentionally some people and some sections of the community hurt society in the name of that community, hurt religion in the name of religion, and hurt the country in the name of their region. These are our weaknesses. These are the elements that have held India back, eroded morale and sapped self-confidence.

There are agitations in many parts of the country and people are making demands. This is but natural in a democracy. We are always prepared to talk to people and also meet their demands to the extent possible. But we also have to be careful all the time that while meeting the demands of one group, we do not hurt the interests of others or weaken them. Therefore, while considering these demands we have to discuss with all concerned and take into consideration their interests. We cannot satisfy all, but the least we can attempt is to see that there is minimum dissatisfaction. Whether the leaders of agitations want it or not, experience shows that violence creeps in. We cannot always find out who indulges in violence. When we find out, we do punish such people. Sometimes the agitators themselves do not know who is indulging in violence, but it harms the country all the same and the developmental process stops. Thus, those who launch agitations complaining of neglect contribute to the slowing down of development.

Let us look at some of the problems that dog us. There is the problem of Assam, about which there has been some strange propaganda. There are certain aspects of the problem which have an element of truth. It is true that foreigners have come and our effort is to stop their infiltration, identify those who have entered illegally and make some other arrangements for

them. This is not something new. When I discussed in the first time, I made some suggestions to the leaders of the Assam agitation. They said, "Either you accede to all our demands or we will not let you go forward with whatever you want to do." The result was that the process of identification, which could have gone ahead in the last few years, was held up. Now they want that process to be started and this work has begun just as we had earlier offered.

There is another strange accusation. Many people lost their lives in the attacks that took place there. Many of them were our Muslim brothers and sisters. Their villages were burnt. But also those of Hindus, tribals, Scheduled Castes, labourers from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. I have expressed sympathy towards all the victims and condemned those who took the law into their own hands. Yet, the propaganda is as though we had a hand in the killings. If you go and talk to the affected people, they will say clearly who was really engaged in rescuing and protecting them and making their lives secure. It is true that at places the security was lax which resulted in killings. To that extent it is our responsibility but the propaganda suggests as though we instigated the killings. Who are the people indulging in this propaganda? They are the very persons who delivered inflammatory speeches, instigated people and created an atmosphere of threat and violence.

There is also the problem of Punjab. I do not want to go into the details: they have been repeatedly mentioned. Our effort in this country has always been to see that every community and every region receives justice and a fair share of the total wealth and resources of the country. Whatever demands I could meet from my side were accepted by me at the very beginning, but will it be just on my part to take decisions which may concern other regions and on which there may be no agreement? I may recall that it is being alleged that I am deliberately stalling a decision. Can the Central Government gain if any region or any community were to remain weak? Won't it rather weaken the Central Government itself because our strength depends on the strength of our regions? What is the

Centre? Is it only the City of Delhi or the Secretariat or the Prime Minister's Office? The Centre is that which holds everyone together and is responsible for the security of the country. It is also responsible for ensuring justice to all. Therefore, no one who is at a comparative advantage whether an individual or a State should claim more than due. All the same, the real power belongs to our States. Whenever there are constraints on resources, it puts strain on us as well. There are cuts imposed on the Central ministries and also on the States. We are not happy about it, but we are helpless. If there are rains, it immediately changes our prospects: but in the event of drought or floods we all suffer. If the agitations, on which so much money is spent, were not there, we could make headway faster.

I was speaking about Punjab. This problem came up before me about two years back. My Government came into power in 1980. I should like to remind you that the people who are today agitating and making demands were in power in Punjab for three years earlier. During those three years they had all the opportunities to resolve their problems and meet their own demands. However, they did not raise their voice then. I should like to ask them and also pose this question to you, as to why they did not resolve these problems. Aren't they guilty of failure to act when they had the opportunities? Why did they not act? Probably because even at that time they could not have got whatever they wanted. So, when we came to power the entire responsibility was thrust on us. We are ready to resolve the problem provided the agitators are willing to sit down and reach an agreement with those others also who are concerned with this problem.

There are many other voices being raised which make us feel that the strength and unity of the country may be threatened. Fortunately, the sense of unity in the country is very strong. In connection with Assam, another false propaganda is being carried out throughout India. When I spoke about the minorities, I used to be accused of being more concerned about Muslims, Sikhs, Christians and other minorities. It was alleged that I was not bothered about the Hindu majority. May I remind you that in our

country one community may be in a minority in one part and in a majority in another? Similarly, people belonging to one religion may be in a minority at one place and in a majority at another. The new line taken by detractors is that I am not at all worried about the minorities and that I go along with what the majority wants.

All political parties want votes at the time of elections. But today, standing here on the ramparts of the Red Fort and recalling our freedom struggle, let us also remember the era in which we were born, the life we spent, the sacrifices we made and the services we rendered. While it is natural to rejoice in victory and be saddened by defeat, our tradition teaches us that there is something above victory and defeat, and that is our duty. Our duty is to take care of our country. Even though we may not be able to complete the task, we should proceed along the path of progress to the extent we are capable.

Many people laid down their lives during the freedom struggle. Many did not live to see Independence. When we were young we did not imagine that we would be able to attain freedom within our lifetime. Yet that thought did not let us falter in our step nor did it weaken our resolve. We knew that we would take the country up to the point we were capable of and that later others would carry the flag. Today we are engaged in the task of development in the same spirit and the same spirit moves us in making the country stronger.

The country faces many dangers. There are external dangers and our internal weaknesses. I do not want to scare you and I know that you are not the ones to be scared. It is our responsibility, however, to recognize the situation. Only when we recognize the crisis can we keep ourselves fully prepared to face it. Today imperialism is not of the kind it used to be. Today it does not intrude into a country with troops. It exerts a variety of pressures in a surreptitious manner, pressures which are economic, political and of other kinds, which are not less pernicious than armed intrusion and in fact more dangerous because the common people are not able to recognize them. We have seen what has happened in many countries. They are

independent and yet there is a shadow over their independence. India does not want that. Our path is clear. We want to be self-reliant through democracy, socialism and nonalignment. Some say that we are tilting this way or that, but we take all our decisions keeping the interest of India in view as also the interest of world peace. We might be more friendly with some than others but we have not allowed friendship or disagreement to come in the way of our decisions. We take the right decision and it is that which accounts for whatever success we have had in all spheres. Everyone knows that we are a country with ideals. It does not mean that we are able to achieve all our ideals or that we do not have failings and do not commit mistakes.

Unfortunately, the problem of corruption comes up and we regret to say that corruption is there. But it will be wrong if we were to raise the issue of corruption to the level of a bogey and insist that it will grow stronger. We have to see how to eradicate this evil from our life. There is corruption in other countries, too, but we are not concerned with them. We are concerned with ourselves and we must fully strive to root out this problem from all spheres-- from politics, from among the officials, from traders and others. We must raise our sights above our own gains and ask ourselves whether we are prepared to weaken the entire society for our own petty gain. We should ask ourselves whether we are prepared to bring in a situation wherein our future generations will be harmed. Every citizen has to give thought to it. Atrocities have been committed against women. This is not something new. The time has come when this cannot be tolerated any more. The time has come when the entire society must see that no atrocity is tolerated either against women or against men. Our women, our young men, our farmers who are the country's backbone, our workers who are our limbs and all our people- whatever region, language or religion they may belong to-- must be strengthened. All of them have the right to receive justice and they will be strong only when they do receive justice. This stupendous task cannot be carried out by the Government or the officials alone. It can be accomplished only when every citizen realizes that as a

citizen of India it is equally his responsibility because that alone will ensure his future. And if the future were dim, it will not only hurt him but will also hurt the coming generations. This is the spirit that must be imbibed.

I said just now that the country faced dangers. There may be no direct threat to our borders at this time. But there is an atmosphere of war throughout the world. India has always been peaceful and that is why we have had a big role in initiating the Nonaligned Movement. We want friendship with our neighbours. There have been some recent developments and I should like to reiterate that we do not want to interfere in the affairs of any other country. Countries must resolve their internal problems themselves. But if there is large-scale violence, killings and loot, we have to condemn it. And we have always done so. In our neighbouring country, Sri Lanka, with whom India has had close relations, things have happened which have also affected the Indian citizens there. It is natural for us to be concerned. We have no intention to interfere. We want to maintain our friendship and our relations. We do not want that anyone should suffer but because our people have been attacked, our own citizens and those who emigrated from here, we are particularly concerned and we express our sympathy with those who have been the victims of violence. We must deal with all these problems in the most responsible manner. One wrong step taken in excitement could lead to far-reaching harm, making it difficult to restore balance. By God's grace we have so far shown great forbearance in all these international problems.

We have always tried first to understand the problem and then take steps with great care and caution. In this way we have succeeded in our efforts. We should not do anything which may harm those whom we want to help. People of Indian origin are living in several countries and some of them have become citizens of the countries of their adoption but some have remained Indian citizens. We should keep the interests of all those people in mind. We do not want to interfere in anybody's internal affairs. When humanitarian aspect is involved, we must speak out.

As I have said earlier, I am not concerned with any one caste or



religion. I am concerned for all, whether they are Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs or of other religions. I am concerned because they all belong to India, not because they belong to any particular religion. They are all human beings. Today's world is convulsed by an economic crisis. There are challenges everywhere. There is unemployment. Here, I want to say something about the unemployment in our own country. It is a serious problem and we have been paying attention to it. We have just evolved two schemes, one for the landless people who are the worst hit in our countryside and who bear the brunt of the problem of unemployment. We want that at least one member of each family should get employment. This programme is going to be launched shortly and a big sum has been provided for it. Initially, this programme was started in Maharashtra where it was a success. We are, therefore, now extending it to the entire country. But I should like to remind you that we cannot cover everyone all at once. We hope that initially we will be able to cover about 30 lakh persons and as we achieve success, others also will be covered by the programme.

Similarly, in the urban areas, the educated young men are under severe strain. It is our effort, therefore, to provide resources every year for 2.5 lakh educated unemployed young men to stand on their own legs. Thus, each year new programmes are introduced.

Many people have ridiculed our 20-Point Programme, but the fact remains that it has made an impact. There have been some shortcomings but generally it has benefited people and is continuing to benefit them. You can see its impact if you go to the villages. Those who ridiculed the programme perhaps don't remember what the countryside was like and what kind of poverty prevailed. It is a matter of satisfaction that the old scenario has now faded out. We are progressing and we shall continue to progress.

We do not want to fight with anyone, but you know that we have been attacked in the past and it has been an experience which we cannot forget. We, therefore, have to keep ourselves in readiness. Here I want to say a word about the brave officers and jawans of our armed forces. They have

defended our borders with great courage and bravery. With the same devotion, they are also helping our people during floods and other natural calamities in peace time. They deserve our congratulations.

We must forget high or low, we must forget where we live, what is our status and what are our views. But we must remember our motto to make India strong and great and all our thoughts must be how to progress along that path. I greet you all once again, particularly our young men and women. In their eyes there is new hope, on their shoulders new responsibilities, and in their hearts new courage. We are all full of this new spirit, whatever be our age. In this I include myself. You and I are but servants of one nation. We must not think about our status; we must always think in terms of serving the weaker sections and those who, due to some reason, have remained backward. We must always think how to list the downtrodden so that we may march forward together and make the country strong and great. We must strengthen the country not only from the economic or political point of view but also morally and intellectually. Let us today take a pledge that we will not do or say anything which may denigrate our country in any way. We must keep the common man's morale high, make him self-confident and self-reliant. If we take this pledge and act accordingly in the next year, then we can work wonders. Not once but many times we the people of India have shown that whenever we take a decision with firm determination, we can achieve success. Let us show this once again, my brothers and sisters. I again salute you and wish you a happy future.