

I want to reach the millions of my countrymen, not only those who are sitting in front of me, or the people of Delhi, but also those who are witnessing this function through INSAT and are participating with us in this happy celebration. I also want my voice to reach those millions of my Indian brothers and sisters who are outside the country and those who cannot listen to me either through the radio or the INSAT but only through their hearts.

Today is our 36th Independence Day, and we are standing in front of the historic Red Fort which throughout modern history has been the symbol of our urge for Independence. From 1858 to the time when Gandhiji launched his non-violent movement and to the time when Netaji Subhash Bose created an army, all Indians had but one desire to see the flag of independent India flying on the Red Fort. And then 35 years ago Jawaharlal Nehru for the first time unfurled our flag here. His connection with the Red Fort had been established even earlier when he, together with other brave people of the country, had come forward in defence of the people imprisoned at the Red Fort.

In a way, we can say that today is a day of tears for those millions who fought and gave their lives in our struggle for freedom and those who strove to safeguard this Independence. But this land is not a land of tears. Today is the day when we are proud of the fact that we did not let our vision become blurred because of tears, nor did we succumb to our injuries. We have gone ahead, overcoming all dangers and difficulties, whether in our struggle against alien rule, or in the struggle to safeguard our borders, or in the struggle that we are waging today against poverty, economic backwardness and injustice. India has a tradition of overcoming its sorrows and marching forward with determination.

Today all of us-- the farmers, the labourers, the unemployed, the womenfolk, the Scheduled Caste people and the backward classes, the tribal people-- all those who are still not fully within reach of the fruits of freedom, and industrialization and modernity, all are together in this struggle. If we have not been successful completely in our goals it is not

because the desire was not there or the effort was not there, but because such gigantic tasks cannot be accomplished through magic or in a day. No matter how high we set our goals and how hard we try, such things take their own time. But if we remain united and show the same determination that we did during our struggle for Independence or that we do at times of external aggression, we can certainly make quicker progress in our battle against poverty.

But I am sad to say that this determination is not always manifest. When we were under alien rule they exploited our greatest weakness. They tried somehow or the other to create dissensions among us either in the name religion or on some other grounds. Thus they sought to sow the seeds of disunity and weaken our fight for Independence which we carried on through peaceful means under the leadership of Gandhiji. But we did not become victims of their machinations. There were occasional riots and disturbances, but generally we progressed along our chosen path.

When we set forth on a journey, we come across all types of roads and paths. Some are wide, others are narrow and we have to select the path along which we want to move forward. There are not many ways open to a country like ours which was poverty-stricken and oppressed, at times beset with fears. In fact, we have only one path open to us, the path of unity. We tried to create a society which would not fear oppression or succumb to suffering. There are many sitting before me who were born after the advent of Independence and who cannot even imagine the humiliations we had to go through and the poverty that prevailed. Today we still have poverty in the country, but together with this the middle class has grown in strength and in numbers too. There is some unemployment today but many people have also gained opportunities for better employment. The more we progress, the more such opportunities will increase.

Earlier, we had to stretch our hands to beg for food, but today we produce enough food. But this is not enough. With the increase in population, we need more land for cultivation, more grains, more education, and more health services. Things which we could not even dream of

earlier, have become necessities today for every person and every family. Our effort is to see that whatever little we have is so distributed that no one suffers. People may have a little less but there should be no injustice.

Today, who are our enemies? It may be that we have external enemies and will have them in future, too. Then, like many other countries, we have poverty and economic backwardness as our common enemy. But what was it that weakened India in the first place because of which we lost our Independence? The same thing exists today, which can, and is, weakening the country. It is divisiveness in the name of religion and language, as also provincialism and casteism. I ask you, my brothers, my sisters and dear children, which country has been able to progress without unity and hard work? We want our defence forces to be strong. Why? Not to launch an attack on others, but to defend our own borders, to keep our country safe. We want that our industries should flourish, our agricultural production should grow, employment opportunities should increase, as also the production of those goods which can help raise our living standards and provide comfort and happiness.

We are a peace-loving nation and want that a peaceful atmosphere should prevail not only in our country but in the entire world. But when will this be possible! Only when rumour mongering and injustices are curbed. We know that there are cases of injustice, oppression and corruption. But what is the way to overcome these? Can a weak government launch a struggle against these forces? Can a government which itself is constantly under attack, keep safe the interests of the poor and of the minorities? Can a weak government build a country which can raise its head with pride in the world? Today the time has come to create a strong government, a strong nation. Of course, the time was always there but today this need is being felt all the more because dangers have increased all over the world. The dangers and the difficulties which we, specially the poorer and the economically backward nations, are trying to overcome, are existent more or less throughout the world.

Even the richest and the strongest of nations are facing the problems

of unemployment and inflation. In those countries too the economic situation is not satisfactory. I have had the opportunity of visiting many countries. From other countries which I or my ministers have not been able to visit, we constantly receive reports. Today all countries are worried. And the greatest worry is about the direction in which the human community is heading after having extended its limits of knowledge and ability. Are we heading for suicide and annihilation of this beautiful earth of ours? This is the question which is facing more and more people today. In world capitals and important towns there is a movement on the subject and people are thinking, writing and speaking about it.

There are three big dangers. One is the amassing of the worst kinds of weapons which can destroy the human species, entire cities and lands. Second, the gap between the rich and the poor nations continues to widen. The gap between the rich and the poor exists in our country and in other poor countries also. This is a fact we do not seek to conceal. At least we are trying to establish a socialistic pattern of society and socialism itself means that this difference between the rich and the poor should diminish, that equality should prevail in society and that the fruits of Independence should reach each individual and every family. The third danger is that because of greed we continue to exploit the natural resources of the earth like mining coal and extracting oil without giving a thought to what effect such acts will have on the coming generations.

We are proud of being Indians not because India is far more beautiful or better than other countries. Wherein then lies her greatness? What is that inherent quality which has seen her flourish through centuries and ages and which has given our poor people strength and capability? It is essentially the high ideals of our ancient tradition. Our country may have made mistakes, but we have always set ourselves lofty goals. We have thought not merely in terms of India's unity but have viewed all issues in the context of humanity as a whole.

India has had a tradition of peace and tolerance: tolerance not only towards fellow-men but even towards animals and plants. This has been

our tradition, whether you look at the teachings of the Buddha or those of the Sikh Gurus. You know how Emperor Asoka propagated his teachings of peace throughout the country and how Akbar brought together peoples of different religions and profited from their teachings. Such things have given our country inherent strength.

Our Independence Day also coincides with the birth anniversary of Sri Aurobindo. Where else in the world can you find the example of a revolutionary believing in violence giving up the violent path and turning to spiritualism, all the while retaining his love for his country and seeking out ways to increase the inherent strength and morale of the nation? Then there was Gandhiji who assimilated the best of various religions and forged the weapon of peace, friendship and a sense of brotherhood to fight for our Independence. We were fighting our battle for Independence but not with guns and cannons. Our weapons were unity and patriotism, and our dedication and determination to achieve the goal. Have we lost these weapons today? Does that sense of patriotism exist no more? Are we no more prepared to make sacrifices? I see many children sitting in front of me, and many young men must be listening at this moment to my voice. I call

upon all of them to join hands and be one in their patriotism to strengthen our nation. Those who exploit religion, caste, language and provincialism for political gains do not have the welfare of the nation at heart. There are people who imagine that progress can be achieved only through violence. This gets their names into the newspapers and creates a little stir. But we have to ask ourselves whether we want our names in print or we want to strengthen the country and work for its progress. Now is the time for you to choose your path. I am confident that our children, our elders who participated in the freedom struggle, and those who fought in times of external aggression, will give evidence of the old spirit of unity and strength.

Today we have to reinforce the ancient values of India. We are citizens of India and we should not do anything, say anything and even

think anything that lowers the prestige of Mother India. We all have a tremendous responsibility cast on us, not only towards ourselves but also towards future generations. India is not a country which has been in existence for five or ten or a 100 years. Her history goes back to thousands of years and it will continue to exist for thousands more. If we have to make sacrifices today for the sake of a better future, I call upon you to make those sacrifices and render the necessary services. I have full confidence that no matter what ideology we subscribe to, and whatever political or other differences we may have, we will all be one when it comes to being soldiers for India. We do not don uniforms. We respect those who do and we take pride in them. But we too are soldiers, no less, in the fight for India's progress. With this in view, I once again entreat you to stand united, to remain strong, and overcome difficulties with a cheer and a smile. We want our beautiful country to be even more beautiful, and should cleanse it of all dirt whether it is the dirt in the street, the dirt in our houses or in our hearts. Everybody has to voluntarily accept his own responsibility. We have a habit of blaming others. Let each one of us ask ourselves whether we are doing the right thing or not and whether we are prepared to exert ourselves to the utmost to check those who are doing the wrong things. If the humblest of our citizens, and also the most important, think about these problems, realize their own responsibilities and change accordingly, will not the entire society change, and with this, will not the entire nation change? This is a question which every one of us has to address to his own heart.

I once again felicitate you on this happy day and call upon you to be prepared for every suffering, every risk and every obstacle so that we can bring about a united India which can hold its head high in the community of nations.