

Whenever I hoist the National Flag here, I am reminded of the historic occasion when Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru had first unfurled the flag here. We are reminded of the suffering and hardships through which we had to pass and the hopes with which we had put up our flag. When we look back, we find that we have advanced a good deal along the path we had chosen for ourselves. We also find that we have committed mistakes. We have had our shortcomings. And the farther we have come, the longer the road has seemed to be. At every turn we have found that the difficulties have only increased instead of decreasing and that if we have been able to meet some demands, there are many more to take their place. But life is like that and our effort has been to follow in the footsteps of the great leaders of the past.

Freedom is of various kinds. We deliberately chose the goal of Purna Swaraj (complete independence) as any other freedom would not have been real. Purna Swaraj does not merely mean the freedom to choose our representatives, the freedom for newspapers to make as much noise as they want, although they may be representing the views of a small minority. What it means is that the fruits of freedom should reach every home, specially the homes of those who cannot raise their voice and who do not know what they want. We are trying to take our country towards this kind of freedom. But, there are all kinds of difficulties on the way. It is also bound to hurt some section of the people or the other. We want to improve the standard of living of all people, big or small. But, I am sure you will realise that if the “haves” get even more, not much will be left for the “have-nots”. That's why our socio-economic programmes, though meant for all, have specially the interests of the weaker sections as their objective, whatever the reason for their condition- caste, economic or the regional situation.

Thus, at every step, we have to confront some problem or the other. But we have not faltered in our steps and I am glad to report that the country has taken a big stride forward during the past year.

There was one particular programme which called for action both on the part of the Government and the people. The programme was based on

our feeling that there was a new wave of discipline and awakening in the country. I don't claim that all our hopes were fulfilled. Still, we have taken some concrete steps forward and the programme is still underway. It has made marked progress in those parts of the country where the people were more responsive. You must be aware that production has increased by seven percent. Similarly, we have provided houses to seven million families under our housing programme. Power production too has gone up to 2000 megawatts. The expansion of irrigation facilities too is going on apace. Land reforms have not been as fast as we wanted. This is not a new scheme, but new problems crop up every time in land distribution.

In far off places, they escape our eyes with the result that sometimes mistakes are committed. That is why I keep on saying, time and again, that people themselves should bring to our notice cases of injustice. This should be not merely by way of complaint but also to suggest to us how the problem is to be tackled. We have received greater co-operation from the people during the past year. This is not to suggest that nothing had been done in the previous years. If we had not laid a sound industrial and agricultural base, we could not have progressed as we did last year. At the same time, it is also true that nothing could have been achieved without discipline, howsoever strong the foundation. You would recall that indiscipline was rampant in schools, colleges, factories and elsewhere. It not merely affected production leading to greater shortage of the necessities of life, but all around one only heard slogans of strike and revolution.

We too believe in revolution. I believe that Gandhiji was the biggest revolutionary. But his was the path of non-violence, of peace, of friendship and if we had strayed from that path, we would not have been able to achieve Independence and lay the foundation of our democracy. We tried to step up industrialisation and add to the country's strength in every possible way. Howsoever people may try to denigrate our country, there is no one who can deny that India was never as strong as she is today. Without strength, we cannot improve the condition of the masses. We

imagined that once we had won the struggle for freedom, our Independence would be secure. But, we had to contend with foreign aggressions. More dangerous than these are, however, the secret campaigns which are not visible on the surface. We could hear whispers here and there even earlier. But last year, they turned into an open challenge. These countries which did not help India preferred to support dictatorial regimes, which liquidated hundreds, even thousands of people. Not one of these countries talked about these killings. But, they had the temerity to criticise us.

You may perhaps, recall that this is not the first time it has happened. When Gandhiji was alive, he was also roundly criticised. So was Nehru. And before these sections had turned their attention to me, they had switched over to India as the target of their attacks. Why should India conduct an atomic explosion, they asked, as if this was going to pose a big danger to the world. On the other hand, many of these countries were spending billions on their nuclear arsenal without any excuse of an external danger. They can keep on arming themselves, but we don't have the right to do anything even for our economic development. When we started setting up our steel plants, we were asked why should we need them when our villages were still so poor. You know that steel is the basis of industrial development. It is needed by farmers, factories and the people. If Jawaharlal Nehru had not planned for steel production, we would have been begging abroad for it. Today, we don't have to beg for anything, although we still need a lot of things.

Only a few years back, the prophets of doom said that India would never be able to feed its millions. Today, we have had a harvest of 120 million tons of foodgrains and we don't know where to store them. It is true that Nature had been kind. But we would not have reached this level of production without the help offered by the Government to which the farmers readily responded. Some areas, specially in the south, have suffered from drought and in a few other places, rainfall has been too heavy. I sympathise with the farmers who have suffered as a result. I know they will

be able to face the situation courageously with the help of scientific advancement. We have to see that our Plan schemes reach the remotest corners. We would also like to have special programmes for the various regions, which should take into account their specific needs. We will be able to march forward briskly only when we are imbued with the desire to make the fullest use of our resources and not by demanding the setting up of steel plants or big industrial factories.

We have seen this year that some of our public sector undertakings have registered a profit, although the big industrialists were never tired of saying that the Government was not capable of running factories. Whatever increase in production we have had is because of these factories and I am confident that those which have been lagging behind will also catch up. So, we have to be vigilant all the time to maintain the improvement. I would like to congratulate our workers who have contributed to it.

I will be leaving in a short while for Sri Lanka where, you know, there is big conference of the non-aligned nations. The problems there too is how to safeguard freedom- freedom to think, act and work for each country's future. This is the main problem. If we cooperate and assist each other, we can create a new strength. Poet Tagore has said that if the weak act boldly and firmly, they can generate their own power. This has been our experience also. What was our strength during the freedom movement? We were poor and oppressed. And yet, when we came together and stuck together, we created a force which was even mightier than any army.

This is the strength we have to inculcate among the poor. The problem is that there are some countries which are misled by others. They are keen to seek assistance if they can get it. They don't care if this is going to affect their freedom, for it cannot bring the strength. We have also accepted assistance from other countries, irrespective of their ideologies. But we were firm on one point. We were prepared to accept it only on the condition that our freedom of action for our country's betterment will not be eroded. But we are not prepared to seek aid on any terms. We have stuck to this policy right from the beginning. Today, we are criticised, because of

some restrictions on newspapers and some arrests. The real reason is that our critics cannot tolerate the idea of a poor country like ours marching ahead without the assistance of others. My reply to them is only this: the more they condemn us, the greater will be our resolve to stick to our own path of progress.

You have seen in the past how we have stood up to foreign aggressions. The history of this country has been full of such struggles. We have always stood for peace and tolerance, but we should remember that ours is also a history of courage, bravery and idealism. You are all the representatives of a resurgent India, the symbols of a new awakening. This is important for all, young or old. Criticism or praise is a small matter in one's life. There is only one question before us: How can we take our country forward? This should be our aim, whether others like it or not. If the younger generation is not imbued with the ideal of service to the nation, it will prove to be our greatest weakness.

We have to guard our frontiers and take pride in our armed forces. But they can fight bravely if the nation is behind them. Let us take a look today at our past and future and then decide the direction in which we have to move towards progress. This is our own responsibility which we have to discharge with the strength of our hands and the intellect of our minds. And, if we have this resolve, no one can push us back. I am confident that we will be able to add more to the discipline we have acquired.

There is some speculation these days about the lifting of the emergency that had been declared. No one bothers to notice that it has already been relaxed for several months. What's the result of this relaxation? Has any one of those released admitted that violence, strikes or stoppage of work is bad for the country? Is it not that they are still bent on the same path? What happens in future is not in our hands. It depends on the attitude of those who are engaged in fomenting unrest and indiscipline and in acts of violence and sabotage. They are encouraging forces which have no faith in democracy and secularism or in the kind of freedom that we stand for.

We are again on the march and we have to see that the schemes launched to remove poverty after so many years keep up the tempo that has been acquired. Maybe, the pace is not as fast as we would like it to be. Seven million houses in a big country like ours is not a substantial figure. But it is still some achievement, looking at the fact that there was none earlier.

We want people to take part in schemes for their betterment of their own volition, with a will to serve the country. Gandhiji always stressed that there was no right which did not flow out of a responsibility. Only on the basis of such rights can we achieve true democracy in which the poorest of the poor will also be able to make himself heard in which no section will be able to dominate others because of its social or economic privileges and where the people will try to safeguard not merely their own rights but also those of their under-privileged brothers and sisters. If we care only for the rights of a few, we will only be relapsing into a situation which has proved harmful in the past.

Today, in this country, we need courage and vision to fashion a new India. This will need united efforts on the part of all to lift our country to a position of glory. We have to improve the living conditions of the masses and to see that the future of our children is better and bright. My prayer is that we all should march shoulder to shoulder on this great journey.

Before I close, let me congratulate you all once again on this auspicious occasion and wish you a happy future.

Jai Hind! Jai Hind! Jai Hind!