

Once again we gather at this historic place to celebrate the anniversary of our Independence to pledge ourselves to defend our National Flag and to serve our beloved people. Our Independence day falls during the monsoon when the sun and shade intermingle, which is symbolic of the intermingling of joy and sorrow in the life of a nation as much as in the life of an individual. Ours is a country of farmers. We welcome the rains because the farmers and the entire country depend on this. Our irrigation and power resources and many other programmes depend on the rains. But today, we are under clouds of different kind, the clouds of difficulties and sufferings.

Our country is suffering from some shortages. The prices have risen and and have risen tremendously. We do not wish to conceal this fact, but we should also try to understand as to how these shortages came about. You are aware of the drought, which has affected us during the last to particularly in Maharashtra, Gujarat and Rajasthan, but in Mysore and some other States too the drought has been on an unprecedented scale, which has not been witnessed during the last 50 years. But our people did not lose heart.

I have toured those areas and can vouchsafe for the courage and fortitude with which they have faced the drought. The foreigners who went there to see the conditions were surprised to see the people's courage and determination to face this challenge- whether they dug the land or broke stones or were busy in constructing dams. They sang as they worked. No one complained. If they asked for something it was only the means to rehabilitate themselves. We have to spread this spirit of determination through the entire country.

The areas producing millet, maize and groundnut were particularly affected by the drought. Thus, the shortages began, the prices increased, the chain reaction of shortages was set in motion, the demand increased and the prices rose still further. There were reasons for the price-rise in some cases but in many cases there was no justification for the price-rise. The drought had not affected only our country, but large parts of Asia and

Africa as well suffered drought and had to import grains on a large scale. Thus, the prices of foodgrains rose in other countries and affected the prices in our country, too. The prices have risen not only in these countries but even in the affluent and advanced countries of the world.

The same story of shortages, sufferings and complaints would be revealed if we go through their newspapers or talk to the peoples of those countries. This does not mean that the causes for price-rise in these countries are the same as in India. In fact, they are totally different. But national boundaries cannot check the economic winds. These affect the prices in our country, as these countries have to import the required goods which lead to higher prices in these countries and which in turn affect the prices of goods in our country. Thus, we should see our problems in this wider perspective.

Some people accuse the Government of extravagance. They ask as to where all this money is going? Where has this money gone? Massive amounts have been spent in providing relief to one crore people affected by the drought and you are aware of the huge amounts which we had to spend earlier to look after the refugees from Bangladesh. Then came the war. All this could have been compensated by a good harvest, but it was the other way round and a terrible drought not only wiped out the harvest but even the wells and rivers went dry and inflation increased.

The Government is making all efforts to cut down expenditure. We have effected a reduction of Rs. 400 crores in the expenditure contemplated earlier under various programmes for each Ministry and the State Governments and every department of the Government has been asked to cut its expenditure on non-essential programmes or to temporarily shelve them. Some of the essential public services may be affected by this reduction but we cannot help it.

These are hard times, and as in a family, so in a nation we have to fix priorities. India is a large family and we have to mobilise our resources and use them judiciously. In this context, the main responsibility is that of the Government but in this the public is equally involved to ensure that they too

reduce their expenditure to the minimum.

We all feel annoyed when we hear of black-marketing and shortages, which the people are facing. But the same goods are sold at higher prices in the same shop behind the counter. I have absolutely no doubt that those who hoard or who sell goods in the black market should be dealt with severely and awarded stringent punishment. These people, however, do not belong to a different category. Things are sold in the black market because there are people to purchase them. If the people are not prepared to buy at black market price, the traders would not be able to sell them.

We have seen that for whatever reasons, some people have obstructed the procurement of foodgrains. If there is a fire, the only question is how to put it out and nobody questions how and where from the water is to be obtained. Whatever be our food policy, whether it is liked or not, is it not the duty of everybody to see that what is procured and distributed to all equitably or who need it, so that nobody starves? This is the responsibility of the entire community. We are accused that we have taken over the wholesale trade in wheat. Some people think that this has led to shortage, but no one can prove that grain would have reached the shops if we had not taken this step.

According to the information received from various sources, it has been proved that had we not taken over the wholesale trade in wheat it would not have reached the people and would have gone into the black market depriving the weaker section of the society. Only those who could have afforded a higher price would have got it. The middle class and the urban people have faced difficulty, but we have been able to give grains anyhow to those who needed them most. I do not, therefore, accept there was anything wrong in this policy.

Another question is that why do we not pay more to the farmer? If we now pay higher price for the wheat it will further affect the price of other commodities. The farmer, no doubt, would have got more but it would have caused more hardship to the other section of the population. We all have to swim together. Thus, some people may benefit but the rest will suffer.

During the struggle in Bangladesh, when the people were rejoicing, I had warned that the country would have to pay a heavy price for it in terms of economic and social tensions. And so it happened, and the Government is fully prepared to meet this challenge. I assure you on this occasion that the Government is determined to solve the problem of shortages, rising prices and take strong action against anti-social elements. Some steps are being taken. Programmes have been chalked out and others will be initiated. But no one can do miracles alone, no Government can solve all problems by itself.

We have democracy in our country under which people have got many rights and have to bear many responsibilities. Unless everybody shares responsibility in this matter, the situation cannot improve. As I said, if some people sell at a higher price and others are prepared to pay that price, then this malady cannot be checked. The people have to be alert.

It is necessary that the Government reduces its expenditure but it is also incumbent on the people to cut down their expenses. I do know that there are people in our country who are too poor to reduce their expenditure as they are not getting enough even today. There is a vast number who can hardly make both ends meet. In our present-day society the standard of living has gone up. Certain consumer items not heard of earlier have become daily necessities. Who should decide to make due with the minimum?

Fortunately, there has been good rain this year, but it would take some months for the new crop to reach the market and we have to make arrangements till that time. We seek the people's cooperation to manage with the stocks in hand and with what is being imported to stall any serious situation. All the housewives and others should scrupulously avoid waste. This would enable us to tide over the difficult months ahead.

The people should not take the law into their own hands to deal with the hoarders and profiteers but inform the concerned authorities. We have to create an atmosphere against hoarding. Some people think that it is only through agitations and bandhs that their grievances could be heard. But

here does this lead to ? The work stops, there is disorder and violence and the very items we need become scarce. The prices go up. If there is loot there will not be proper distribution; prices will further go up and there will be strikes. You must have seen in Delhi and other places how people have to face difficulties.

It is the farmer who feeds the people and who forms the backbone of our economy. It is his bounden duty to increase production and make it available to the Government so that equitable distribution is ensured. First, we have to increase production, procure foodgrains and then distribute it among the people. In this we all have to co-operate.

Action has been taken to step up arrangements for increasing production of power, agricultural products and the situation is steadily improving. Along with the demand for personal freedom, we have also to ensure that there is no violence and the people maintain law and order. If there is a clash, it is the common man who has to bear the brunt.

Employees also form an important section of the society. Our progress, specially industrial growth, depends upon them. They too have demands. I realise that strike is an instrument to achieve these demands. But, there are times in the life of a nation when individual demands and individual needs have to be set aside, in the larger interest of the country and the society. We hope that no factory will be closed. Mill-owners and industrialists, whatever their difficulties, will bear them anyhow and see that the mills and factories continue to function. In the same manner, I would request the employees to solve their problems through mutual discussions and negotiations. But under no circumstances should there be a let-up in production. This is the time to take such a decision and act with a sense of responsibility.

Similarly, the common man has also to understand and realise his responsibilities and obligations. Certain things we can tell and other people can also think and tell us. Our democracy does not mean that you only cast your vote. The people of the country voted for us in the elections and we have tried to take such steps which would enable even the smallest man to

have confidence and raise the prestige of India. This has happened. But even after this can we say we have all carried out our responsibilities?

Our ancient scriptures teach us to maintain equanimity during trials and tribulations, amidst stresses and strains, and not to lose our perspective in joy or sorrow. But, what actually happens is that any happy development sends us into ecstasy, while a small difficulty is enough to plunge us into despair. The question is whether we want to be a nation of those who cry, complain or quit in the face of difficulty or a country of the courageous, who squarely and boldly face their trials and privations. This question has to be answered today in our country by the young and the aged alike.

In this gathering today, there are many freedom fighters of yore, old in years no doubt but young at heart. Their zest for life and enthusiasm is as intense as of any man in his thirties, forties and fifties. Today, we seek the co-operation of these young veterans to guide us, to imbue us with their courage and determination.

Rains or no rains, the country must forge ahead. The programmes have to be completed. In war or peace, we do not wish to slacken the pace of our progress. Some people counsel a 'Plan Holiday'. This is dangerous, for, this implies mortgaging India's future to present comforts, ignoring completely the country's poor. There cannot and there will not be any 'Plan Holiday'.

When I last spoke to you here, I had mentioned the changes coming about in the international scene. These changes continue and new friendships are giving a new complexion to this scene. This continent is still to reach the kind of peace and adjustments it should have reached. People blame us. I will not repeat here the story of the prisoners-of-war of which you are all well aware. The Government of Bangladesh and our own have made some proposals, generous proposals, which have been hailed throughout the world. Negotiations are continuing and will be resumed in a few days. But, should these negotiations fall through, the people of India, the people of Pakistan and the whole world will know that the Governments

of India or Bangladesh cannot be blamed for this. They will know who is responsible for the prisoners not going back to their country and who is creating obstruction.

We have together faced many a hurdle. Sometimes we came out flying colours, sometimes success eluded us. Now we face our acid test as a nation and if we are able to tackle it resolutely and courageously, we will have a future ahead of us burnished and bright like gold tried by fire. And, so will be our people.

I will repeat my question today : What kind of a future are we aiming at? We want a people whose hopes will never be shattered. We want a people whose voice, the voice of peace and friendship, is echoed in all corners of the world. Our great leaders held up to us the ideals- of a new world, of a new vision- and we have to fulfil their promises. But that is not enough.

A new generation has come up. I hope this new generation will be the harbinger of a new light. They will be disciplined and brave and will show the veterans present here that they are second to none. They will build a New India.