

We are gathered here today at the Red Fort for the fortieth time. This Fort is a symbol of India's glory. It is a symbol of India's strength. It was from here that the first call for Independence was given in 1857. It was here that Shah Nawaz, Dhillon and Sehgal, followers of Subhas Chandra Bose, stood trial. There can be no greater sacrifice for the love of the country than theirs. It was here that the British flag was lowered and the Indian tricolour first unfurled by Panditji. This flag, so dear to our hearts, commands our deepest respect. Under this flag we fight for the nation's security and progress. All of us are the children of Mother India. We will make India a land of peace, a land of prosperity. As we celebrate Independence Day, what do we understand by independence? What does freedom which we achieved on this day, mean to us? Does independence mean freedom of the people, or do we also think of our land, our forests and the whole environment? Do we also think of development and progress of our country? Yes, all these form part of freedom which has a deeper, more fundamental meaning. We cannot forget our ancient culture, our values and there cannot be any deviation from our principles. We have to follow traditions and maintain our heritage.

What are these values? The foremost is the principle of nationalism. The idea of nationhood is not new for India; it has been deeply embedded in the hearts and minds of the people of India for thousands of years. Nobody has been able to dislodge it. Whether we had political unity or we were under foreign rule, nobody was able to erase the feeling of Indianness which was always deep in our hearts. Today's free India- a glorious, self-reliant nation committed to its ideals of unity and integrity- is the manifestation of this sense of nationalism.

If India is strong every Indian is strong; if India is weak every Indian will be weak. Our endeavour has always been to make the people of India strong and the future of the country secure. In our strength lies our honour, our progress. Being an Indian does not mean that we are mere inhabitants of this country. It means that we are inheritors of a splendid civilization of over five thousand years. We have a diversity of cultures. We belong to

different religions- Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Jains, Parsis, Buddhists. We speak a variety of languages. Our tolerance makes all of them flourish. We accord equal respect to all faiths and religions. Our strength and unity flow from this fact. This is the only path we must follow, for our strength lies in our diversity.

Independence meant the opportunity to govern the country in accordance with our wishes. Like us, many other nations attained freedom, but in very few of them do we find the people the real masters, as in India. India has vouchsafed to its citizens all human rights. If we also look at other nations, we can see how many nations have been able to follow the same path as India and who have been able to give the same kind of freedom and rights which we have given to our people and who have been able to preserve their democracy. In India, the government is in the hands of the people. The people can change a government whenever they so desire. They shape their destiny.

In India free elections have been held in a democratic set-up. We have a free Press and we have laws under which all citizens are equal. We have taken up democratic development. We aim at self-reliance: We remain non-aligned in foreign policy. Our path comprises all these three aspects.

We have only to recall the situation during British rule to realise the progress that India has made. During British rule, deaths from hunger and famine were common. Just before Independence, 30 lakh people died in the Bengal famine. During 50 years from 1900 to 1950, our agricultural output remained static. But from 1950 to 1985 the output increased threefold. Wheat production increased sevenfold and that of paddy fivefold. On this occasion, I would like to extend my congratulations to the farmers of India, for it is due to their hard work that we are independent today.

In public health before Independence, the infant mortality rate was very high. We introduced a vigorous health programme under which thousands of primary health centres were set up. We have eradicated smallpox and controlled malaria. The life expectancy of our people has

virtually doubled and it is over 56 years now. I should like to congratulate our doctors and nurses and others who have made this possible.

Likewise, in the field of education, almost every village has a school today. The education policy which had outlived its relevance and with which we were no longer happy has been changed. We have formulated a new education policy which will provide India a new path leading to strength, unity and self-reliance.

A vast network of roads has been provided to villages. Drinking water is now available in most rural and tribal areas and it will be our endeavour to see that by the end of the Seventh Plan there is no village left in the country without drinking water facility. Industrialisation has provided employment to crores of people. We can see that India has shaken off its backwardness and emerged as a progressive and dynamic nation. Industrial production has gone a long way to improve the quality of their lives, and put the country on the path of progress and prosperity.

Our scientists and technologists have today brought India at par with the developed countries of the world in many fields. We do not think of science and technology for its own sake, but for the common man, the poor and the backward. When we talk of science and technology our objective is to bring it within the reach of the poor people in our villages. Today, when we look into the future and visualise the India of the 21st century, we see before us a strong, self-reliant, self-confident and economically sound nation. This will be achieved through our emphasis on self-reliance, by maintaining our dignity and our honour, by seeing to it that our flag flies high and we move in the world with our head held high. We have been following this path in the past and we will continue to do so in future also. We have taken care that India does not sink into the debt trap. Other nations have got bogged down in heavy debts in the pursuit of development. We have ensured that India does not give in to the pressures of multinationals. This is the only way to our progress and strength. We will not swerve from this path of progress.

Of paramount importance to us is the welfare of the poor, the

deprived and the backward. With all our might, we are endeavouring to better their lot and remove poverty through our anti-poverty programmes, through 20-Point Programme and through our agricultural development programmes. Agricultural development is the main plank for removal of poverty, because of the dominance of agriculture in our economy. During the last five we have succeeded in bringing nearly 10 crore people above the poverty line through these programmes. We hope that by the end of the Seventh Plan, we will be able to lift three quarters of the country's population above the poverty line. Our effort is to wipe out poverty from the country.

I propose to place shortly before the nation a revised 20-Point Programme. We have modified and improved the current 20-Point Programme. Such of these programmes which have been completed and have fulfilled their objectives are being dropped and new ones are being introduced. We will ensure greater employment opportunities under the revised 20-Point Programme.

During the last one year, I have toured the country extensively. I made it a point to visit the most backward and most poverty-stricken areas, among which are tribal areas. I have talked to the poorest of the poor. I have spoken to villagers, to farmers in their homes, in their huts, in their fields. I have met them at places where relief work was in progress. I have shared their difficulties, their miseries. At the same time, I have seen their success, hopes, tolerance, inner strength, perseverance, hard work and struggle. I have seen how bravely they were facing their problems and difficulties and how they were fighting the vested interests, the landlords, the zamindars and the bureaucracy. I am with the country's poor, the oppressed and the weaker sections of our society. We are committed to their uplift.

Among the backward and oppressed people are the poor Harijans, the tribals and our womenfolk, who perhaps form the largest oppressed section of our society. We must ensure that all kinds of discrimination against them is removed and for this, I can assure you, we shall take all the

necessary steps. We may have to change our policies, modify our programmes and strengthen our laws for the uplift of the Harijans, tribals and women. It will be our endeavour to see that our womenfolk receive greater respect, equal rights and economic independence.

At the same time, we cannot afford to lose sight of our ancient philosophical heritage which teaches us that development does not come about only through acquisition of wealth. Accumulation of wealth generates greed and selfishness. It causes more dissatisfaction and leads to misery. Therefore, while we pursue development, we must lay stress on moral values. We have to see that our cultural heritage, the age-old values which have sustained us down the years and kept us united, are maintained and preserved. Since Independence we have made tremendous progress. The signs of progress are visible in all fields. But we have to look into the future also and ensure that it becomes brighter. There is one serious threat to it and that is communalism. It is a matter of shame and a disservice to the nation that people are being killed, houses burnt and shops looted. We cannot afford to let this happen and we will not let it happen. Any kind of violence is wrong, but the worst kind of violence is that which takes place in the name of religion. This, in fact, is a fraud on religion. True religion stands for love and tolerance, love for all fellow beings and respect for all faiths. Different religions are only different paths leading to the same destination. God is reached through many paths. We also see that the snake of fundamentalism is raising its ugly head in our country. Fundamentalism leads to hatred and violence, The Government will take steps to wipe it out, and if it requires the use of force we will not hesitate to do so. We will not allow communalism and violence to spread, we will eliminate them from our society.

Last year when I was speaking to you from here, we had signed the Punjab accord. A dialogue followed and we covered a lot of ground. Elections were held in Punjab and a popular government took office once again and democracy was restored. Because of the accord we have been able to fight terrorism and extremism in Punjab. Side by side, we have

taken steps to improve the training of the police and to ensure that they get the best possible equipment. We have seen to it that they get the best possible equipment. We have seen to it that there are no shortcomings in this sphere. The situation today is that the extremists are on the run and a large number of them are being apprehended or killed. During the last few weeks many extremists have been captured. This objective will be pursued more vigorously. I am sure that over the next few months we will be able to tackle terrorism and wipe out the terrorists completely. This will have to happen soon, for we cannot permit this to go on for long. But what is happening is that whenever we meet with some success in tackling this problem, there is a corresponding frustration among them and then they try to build up their confidence by doing something drastic. For instance last year we saw the assassination of Sant Longowal. This year they have killed General Vaidya. Both these incidents have caused us great grief. The terrorists resorted to these killings when they found that they were being arrested, uprooted and eliminated and the public was turning against them.

Now that the pressure is on the extremists, it is possible that they may resort to some further killings to shake the confidence of the people or to provoke reprisals from the people. But we will remain calm in the face of such provocation. We will see to it that no innocent person is harmed. We will not fall into their trap. I am sure the people will not fall prey to the terrorists' designs. We will have our own strategy and finish them. We will see that every measure that is called for to wipe out the terrorists is taken. We will not be found lacking in the use of force, police action, political will and dedication. This calls for a lot of moral courage and removal a number of misconceptions. It is strange that violence and arson take place in the name of religion, in the name of saints and gurus. While there is no doubt that the full might of the Government is called for to tackle the question of extremism, it is essential that the people also extend their conscious support and take a firm stand against this menace. If we want to fight extremism, we can do so if all the 75 crore Indians stand together. We can face extremism unitedly in keeping with the traditions of non-violence. Gandhiji said that the philosophy of non-violence is not merely for saints

and rishis but it is also a faith to be followed by the common man. Non-violence makes the people strong. Gandhiji taught us that violence and intolerance expose our weaknesses. He proved that hatred and intolerance should not be countered with hatred and intolerance. He showed us the path of peace and non-violence. We can fight terrorism only through peace and non-violence. And we will triumph over terrorism through this path of tolerance and communal harmony. We have to see that the people unite irrespective of their religion, caste and language and fight this war against terrorism just as they fought for Independence.

If India has to progress then we have to look not only inward but outward also, across our frontiers, at the outside world. The world today is faced with a great danger- a danger that threatens to destroy this planet, threatens to impede the progress of India. If India has to become strong, and if we have to ensure regional security in our part of the world, then there is only one way to accomplish this. War will know no frontiers and it will not be confined within the borders of the warring countries. It can destroy the whole world, can annihilate the entire mankind. It is our effort to put a stop to the mad race for nuclear weapons. There is only one way and that is disarmament. It is only when nuclear weapons are destroyed that the farmers and the people of India can be assured of security. Our stand on the question of disarmament is very clear and eloquent- for peace, for the future of the world and for the future of mankind. Our foreign policy gives us strength. We have remained independent and contributed to world peace. If we have to follow the path of progress and development, world peace is essential. In the international forums India's voice is heard loud and clear. The voice of India is the voice of the 75 crores of its people. In this lies our strength.

Today we command respect in the comity of nations because we have followed the path of non-alignment and self-reliance. We speak with courage, conviction and confidence.

In a sense non-alignment is international democracy. It does not pose any threat to our independence. The concept of non-alignment was given

to the world by Panditji. Indiraji carried the torch forward. The Non-aligned Movement which began in a small way has a membership of 101 countries today. Today, two-thirds of the countries in the world speak the voice of the non-alignment. During the last few years, India was the Chairperson of the Non-aligned Movement. We were faced with many problems- the problem of Grenada, the Libyan issue, apartheid and the flouting of international laws by the bigger countries. The world passed through a difficult phase, but under India's leadership the Non-aligned Movement gained strength and contributed to world peace.

On the occasion of Independence Day today, I extend my warm felicitations to all my countrymen. My special, greetings to the members of our armed forces, to those who are guarding our frontiers whether in the desert, on the high mountains or in the dense forests. It is because of their sacrifices that India has been able to preserve her freedom again and again.

As I stand here I see before me temples, mosques, gurudwaras and churches. This is the real wealth of India and this is where our real strength lies. As I stand here my mind goes to Gandhiji and Panditji. I also think of Maulana Azad, Sardar Patel, Rajendra Babu, Rajaji, Subhas Chandra Bose, Shastriji and Indiraji. Indiraji stood here at this very spot at the Red Fort sixteen times. She fought for India's poor and the backward throughout her life. She fought for India's unity and integrity and laid down her life for it. The responsibility of fulfilling her tasks lies on our shoulders and we will fulfil her dreams in every way. Let us dedicate ourselves to preserving and safeguarding our independence, democracy, secularism, socialism and the unity, integrity and honour of the country.