

Independent India today enters the twenty-fourth year of her freedom. Every year, on the banks of the Yamuna, at this Red Fort, the people and those who serve them meet one another, and derive strength from one another. The country has witnessed many changes in the past one year. There has been a rethinking by the various political parties and the people on various issues. All of them have been trying to clarify their policies and looking for new paths. The people had an opportunity to strengthen democracy and to take stock of their progress.

The past year had been a year of great revival of activity. Earlier, many programmes had been left unexecuted either because of war, drought, economic recession or other reasons. We are again marching forward but certain forces are perturbed by the speed of the progress we are making and are opposing the steps we are taking. However, I know that the people are aware of what is going on, of what is right and what is wrong and what is good and what is bad. The people have the capacity to discriminate between good and evil. Herein lies the value of democracy. Real power vests in the people.

Ever since I was elected to this office I have been touring the four corners of our country. And never before, as in the last year, have I found our people so alert, so awakened, and so aware of their rights. Never before have I seen them so hopeful and so ready to welcome the new changes. This is both a good sign and a great challenge to us. We have to face this challenge.

As I said earlier, many programmes which could not be implemented are being carried out now. Production in both agriculture and industry has increased and is continuing to increase. Nationalisation of banks has thrown open new avenues to the people, particularly to the youth of the country. Though it is more than a year since nationalisation of banks took place, the fruits of nationalisation have started accruing to the people only during the last few months. As you know, the implementation could be started only after the matter was cleared by the Supreme Court.

These days we hear strange slogans being raised. Some people talk

of violence. But I want to tell them that violence has so far not solved any problem. However noble our objectives may be, if we adopt wrong means we cannot achieve these objectives satisfactorily. I had thought that the debate between violence and non-violence had already been settled in our country. During our independence struggle we had disproved the belief of those who felt that we could not achieve independence through non-violence. We proved to the world that it was possible to free our country by means of non-violence.

I want to assure you that even economic progress and all big changes can be brought about in our country through non-violence. It is our duty to rise above 'slogan-mongering' and unitedly find out ways and means of doing some solid work. Some of our young men think that they have discovered a new way of revolution. I can understand the disappointment and restlessness which is felt by them. I do believe that restlessness is not always a bad sign. But I appeal to them to first see in which way the interests of their country can be best served, whether these interests can be served by raising slogans and by indulging in destruction and sabotage.

We are today facing some big and difficult problems. Price increase is one. This is, in fact, a big problem. When prices rise, the common people feel the pinch, particularly those belonging to the fixed income groups, as also the workers. We are very much exercised over it. However, you have also to appreciate the fact that when a nation goes forward prices move up to a certain extent. Doubtless, it is our duty to ensure that the prices of essential commodities are stabilised and there is a balance between incomes and prices. At the same time, we know that when prices of foodgrains go down, our peasants and those living in rural areas are adversely affected. This adds to their burden. We have therefore to weigh every issue very carefully and then find a middle path. Thus, if there is any distress it will be evenly distributed and no one individual will suffer more than another. We are seriously exercised over the problem of the "haves" and "have-nots", between those who have everything in excess, whether

urban property or anything else, and others who have very much less. As already announced, we are going to take some action in this matter.

With our march forward, we will have also to be careful that there is no setback to our production. Any slowing down in our pace of progress will considerably affect our ability to help the poor and the down-trodden. I know that many people feel that the country is not going ahead with sufficient speed. I am, however, confident that the path we have chosen is bound to accelerate our progress and, by taking new steps, we would be able to forge ahead.

This is not the time for minor changes here and there. We have to bring about great changes. Gandhiji and Pandit Nehru have shown us how big changes can be brought about through the strength of the people.

When I was thirteen years old, my father gave me some advice in the letter he wrote from jail. He told me not to do anything secretly and not to do any work which it might be necessary to hide from others. By adopting this principle in our struggle for freedom, Gandhiji could give it a non-violent character and it became a source of strength for the weakest among us. All parties, organisations and the people should work in the open so that the people are able to understand them and help and co-operate with them. This is the essence of democracy.

It must be admitted that our economic condition has improved considerably. Along with progress our problems have multiplied, for progress creates problems and sometimes problems show the way to progress. Our problems are like a mountain which we climb. We cannot afford to look back and see how far we have climbed. We have only to think of how much more remains to be climbed. For that purpose we have to rally together.

This is the approach we have to adopt in the matter of price stabilisation and in creating employment opportunities for our youth. Where price increase is inevitable we have to put up with it. Many employment avenues have been suggested, some within the Plan and some outside the Plan. I hope our young men will take advantage of these and explore new

ways so that they can stand on their own feet and be self-reliant. The youth in advanced countries have shown how self-reliant they can be.

We have started implementing youth employment schemes. Some young men are receiving assistance from the banks. Some get assistance from other sources. All these schemes will serve as effective instruments for providing employment to the unemployed young. It must be realised that everybody cannot at once get job suited to him. We are on a journey which is long and arduous and we can reach our destination only step by step. Already many steps have been taken on this journey with courage and enthusiasm. When our young men join us in this march they would be able to take us all forward more speedily.

Undoubtedly there is need for economic and social transformation. At the same time there are certain difficulties which come in the way of such transformation. Recently, there was a new problem. A new slogan had been coined : "Land Grab". I do not want to say anything at length about this on this occasion. I will confine myself to only saying that some people have too much land whereas some have no land at all. This is not just. We have taken a few steps in this direction which have given relief to some people. It is our duty to see that the Acts which were passed with this end in view are immediately enforced. Whether this is done by the Central or the State Governments, implementation must be done honestly and effectively. The Central Government are doing their best to persuade the State Governments to implement these reforms speedily and thereby discharge their responsibility. Necessary legislation which has not yet been passed will soon be passed. But, however strongly we may feel about it, it would not be just possible to give land to everybody. The problem before us now is how to distribute the fallow land that is good. We are concentrating our attention on this and I hope that this will be done more expeditiously.

We still face yet another problem, which is frequently and widely discussed. That is the problem of communalism. One of the many great qualities possessed by our country, not from the modern period but from

time immemorial, is that it has treated all religions on the basis of perfect equality. We have equally respected the different philosophies and creeds of all the religions. This has not meant the individual departing from his own religion. But we have always given shelter in our country to others, irrespective of their faith.

I have often asked myself as to what is really Indian. Our ancient saints and sages have told us that Truth is one but there are several paths to reach it. We have always accepted this fundamental truth. If we forget it we will weaken ourselves, and if we remember it we will go from strength to strength.

This is an age when the people of one country learn from the experience of other countries. This is not a sign of weakness but the sign of a new age. We can learn a great deal in the field of science and technology and use this knowledge for the removal of poverty of our people. Change is the law of life and the changes taking place in the world today are of entirely different kinds. Basic changes are coming about. That is the reason why there is so much turmoil, turmoil not peculiar to our country alone but which is sweeping the whole world.

The cardinal principle of our foreign policy is world peace. If there is a dispute between two parties, they should settle it by mutual discussion without taking recourse to force. This we have been repeating for years together. Recently, two developments have given us great happiness. One is that President Nasser of the United Arab Republic has accepted the U.S. peace proposals for West Asia. Perhaps a complicated problem will be solved by this. President Nasser has displayed courage in accepting these proposals. Similarly, Soviet Russia and West Germany have met together and signed a non-aggression pact. The point which India has been repeatedly stressing in pursuit of its foreign policy has, it seems, been accepted by them. I hope that the result of these two recent developments will prove beneficial to world peace.

Unfortunately, in another area, war is still continuing. There, it is not only continuing but it has further enlarged. Many people who have nothing

to do with it— innocent children, old men and women have also been engulfed by it and they are undergoing tremendous suffering. Our heart goes out to them in sympathy.

In the United Kingdom, a step which the new government has taken after coming into power has caused us some anxiety. This is their intention to give some arms aid to South Africa. We know that this aid would give encouragement to the South African Government's policy of colour bar and apartheid. It would also prove dangerous to the independent countries adjoining South Africa. We have raised our voice against this and we hope that the United Kingdom would reconsider her policy.

I come here every year and meet the people. It seems to me that the assembly gathered here today is larger than in previous years. This may be due to several factors including hopes roused in the hearts of the people, as also the realisation that the struggle is a long and difficult one in which they should participate. It is not enough that we enjoy the facilities and comforts which are available in an independent country. We should equally share the miseries, sufferings and burdens that are there. If we look at our problems from this point of view, then we would be able to solve them.

There are many people in our midst who do not have strength enough to bear any more burdens nor can they march in step with us. Every year we remember them on this occasion. So long as we are not in a position to render more help to these people we will not be able to accomplish anything, however laudable our programmes for their betterment may be.

I realise that the Harijans, the tribals, those living in the mountains and forests and those on whom the burden of poverty is the heaviest have been the least cared for after Independence. There are many reasons for this state of affairs. In some cases, even if there is a programme for their uplift, the benefits cannot reach them owing to lack of communications. We shall do our best to help these people, however great the difficulties.

We are determined to solve our problems, however complicated they might be. Ours is a great country, but sometimes we are lost in trivial

matters. I am a member of a political party. Most of us are members of this or that party. Even if you take all these parties together, they are very small compared to the totality of the people of India. We have always to keep the general good of our country, its problems, its development and its progress, before us and not that of any party and have to relegate small matters and small objectives to the background. Ours is a great country and, therefore, we have always to adopt a high and noble outlook. Gandhiji tried to place this picture of our country before us. Young as we then were, we could not understand this and were sometimes angry with him. We felt that perhaps we knew more than he did, just as our young men feel today. But now we have started realising the true significance of Gandhiji, and it may be several decades before people will realise what a great man was amidst us. As we realise the extent of his greatness, we should try to shape our thoughts and actions accordingly so as to better serve our country. This is the objective we should keep before us. To provide material comforts to the people is the duty of both government and society. But there is a higher objective to be achieved. We want to provide facilities to the people to increase their strength so that all might join in uplifting the country and making it really great.

I had referred earlier to our foreign policy. With the interests of our country uppermost in our minds, our policy has been to maintain friendship with our neighbouring countries and to arrive at agreements with them, by sorting out differences and seeking new ways of co-operation. At the same time we realise that the stronger our society and the greater our unity, the more strongly would we be able to stand up to other nations. You know that our brave defence forces, whether they belong to the Army, the Navy or the Air Force, and whether stationed in the mountains, the plains, the deserts or on the sea coast, are ever prepared to face every danger. Part of their strength lies in the strength of their arms. The other part lies in the strength and the support of a strong and united people standing behind them. The defence forces will be relieved of much anxiety with the knowledge of strong support assured from a united people. Today, on my behalf as well as on your behalf I offer my good wishes to the Armed Forces, whether

they are stationed here or are far away from us.

I also offer my good wishes to our peasants and workers, students and intellectuals, traders and government employees and to the women of India, whether they live in cities or in villages. As a servant of this country, I renew my pledge that, with your co-operation I will continue to struggle to eradicate the poverty in our midst. Gradually, our people are getting nation-and-civic conscious. As they come to realise their duty towards the building of a glorious future for India, they would be prepared to make any sacrifice. Our people are brave and have shown great courage, particularly in times of difficulty. Sometimes, however, when we have felt there was no danger, we have tended to relax and become complacent. But, the present age is a perilous age, not only for our country but for the whole world. Whoever is weak may come to grief. Therefore, it is our duty to remain united and overcome our shortcomings and failings.

We have to take determined steps to move forward. All of us should ask ourselves a question every day. Have you done anything for the country? Have you done it honestly and industriously? If you are able to get honest answers to these questions, you will soon find that we are able to accelerate the pace of progress of this country.

Thousands of years ago, Gautama Buddha said: "I am not concerned with what others are not doing. My only concern is with what I do or do not do". Every citizen should have this ideal before him. Everybody should see that he pursues correct path, that he serves the country and society, and if he does that the society would gather strength. We have to make full use of that strength and knowledge. And I hope that our young men, who are now restless, will become a great source of strength to our society and will be able to give a new leadership to the country. I have full faith in them. Sometimes some of them are led astray but most of them wish to become an asset to their country. So all of us who are now not so young should help these young men.

We are citizens of an ancient country which is now becoming a modern one. We would like to build up this country in such a manner that if



India's name is mentioned anywhere or if her citizens go anywhere, there goes with them a new light, a new strength and a new ideology.