

Freedom is a responsibility

India today celebrates 79 years of freedom. Seventy-nine years ago, a nation that had endured centuries of colonial rule finally stood on its own feet. Independence was not merely the transfer of power. It was the fulfilment of a dream for which generations of Indians fought, suffered and sacrificed. Our freedom came at a heavy price. Countless men and women gave up their homes, careers and comforts. Many went to prison. Many faced bullets. Many never returned to their families. Some became famous names in history while thousands of others remained unknown. Yet they shared one dream. The dream of an India that would be free to decide its own destiny. That freedom gave us more than a flag and a national anthem. It gave us the right to speak, to vote, to question, to dream and to build. It gave a poor child in a remote village the same constitutional promise as a child born in a powerful city. It gave India the opportunity to transform itself. And what a journey it has been. In 1947, India was a deeply poor and largely uneducated country struggling with the wounds of Partition. Today, it is one of the world's major economies, a nuclear and space power and a country whose technological and scientific capabilities command global attention. We have built highways, airports, railways, digital networks, universities and institutions that have changed the lives of lakhs and crores. From food security to space missions, from digital payments to renewable energy, India's progress since Independence is a story of determination. But Independence Day should not only be a celebration of how far we have come. It should also make us ask how much further we can go. A developed India cannot be built by governments alone. It cannot be created only through big projects, new policies or ambitious targets. It will be built in our homes, schools, workplaces, farms, factories and streets. It will be built when a student chooses knowledge over distraction, when a young person chooses enterprise over dependence, when a citizen refuses corruption and when each of us respects public spaces, follows the law and performs our duties honestly. The call to keep the Tricolour in every home and every heart carries a larger meaning. Patriotism cannot end with waving the flag on August 15. It must reflect itself in how we treat our fellow citizens, how we protect our environment, how we respect our institutions and how sincerely we contribute to the country. The tribute to our freedom fighters must therefore be more than a ceremony. The best way to honour them is to strengthen the India they dreamed of. As the nation sings Vande Mataram and the Tricolour rises at the Red Fort and every village of the country today, let every Indian remember that freedom is both a privilege and a responsibility. The first 79 years were about building a free India. The next phase must be about building a stronger, more prosperous, more just and more confident India. The future of that India is not someone else's responsibility. It is ours.

REWIND: PARLIAMENT & THE OPPOSITION



INDER JIT

All eyes are on the new Lok Sabha, which is due to assemble today for its first sitting. How will it fare? Will Parliament continue to slide downhill, as during Indira Gandhi's time, and decline further? Or, will it recapture some of its lost glory and élan and play its due role as during Nehru's time, widely acknowledged by experts as Parliament's "golden period". Incredibly enough, most people seem to feel that the Lok Sabha poll has raised a big question mark over Parliament. Some have even gone to the length of writing off Parliament arguing: "Rajiv Gandhi has won 400 seats. The Opposition is down to a bare hundred. Atal Behari Vajpayee, Chandra Shekhar, Bahuguna, Satyasadhan Chakraborty and other Opposition stalwarts have been defeated. You can now forget Parliament". But in saying so these people seem to miss out on one basic fact of life. Quantity has never been a substitute for quality. You can have a large but ineffective Opposition. Equally, you can have a small but effective Opposition.

Parliamentary democracy provides for a Government by discussion, debate and consensus. The Opposition is an integral part of the system and is hence known in Britain as Her Majesty's "loyal" Opposition. But the prefix "loyal" does not detract from the Opposition's basic responsibility. Its principal task is to keep Ministers and civil servants on their toes and ensure good government. Numbers are undoubtedly important. They are, however, not crucial. In fact, India's first Lok Sabha faced a somewhat similar situation. The Congress Party, led by Nehru, bagged 364 seats. The Opposition totalled 119 members. Nevertheless, the Lok Sabha was effective, thanks to two factors. First, Nehru bent over backwards to encourage the Opposition and to set up healthy conventions. He also proved through word and deed that no democratic Government should ever ride roughshod over the Opposition, howsoever weak and divided. Second, the Opposition, which included some eminent public men, conducted itself with great responsibility.

Most Congress-I men seem to have a wholly erroneous understanding of parliamentary democracy. Over the years, they have come to believe that they can do what they please as the majority party. But parliamentary democracy is not rule by a brute majority. Indeed, Nehru sought to make this quite clear, recognising the harsh reality that the Opposition, though small, represented a majority of those who had voted. As the Leader of the House, in addition to being the Prime Minister, he rose above party consider-

ations time and again and expressed himself in the best interest of healthy parliamentary functioning. On one occasion, he even ticked off one of his Ministers and came to the rescue of the Opposition. The Opposition wanted some information but the Minister stalled on the plea: "This cannot be given in public interest." A visibly agitated Nehru was soon up on his feet and intervened to state in so many words: "Mr Speaker Sir, I see no public interest involved. The Minister should give the required information."

There can be no two opinions that Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee and some others among the Opposition leaders will be greatly missed. Many Parliament watchers, therefore, hope that the BJP's plans to bring Mr Vajpayee and Mr Chandra Shekhar -- back into the Lok Sabha will succeed. Nevertheless, the Opposition still has several distinguished leaders on its side-- to make Parliament both lively and effective, provided they take their job seriously. (Parliament calls for concentrated hard work and vigilance -- and not just one "great" speech in a session!) Prominent among those who will continue to adorn the Lok Sabha are Mr Jagjivan Ram, Mr Charan Singh, Prof Madhu Dandvate, Mr Indrajit Gupta, Mr K.P. Unnikrishnan, Mr Biju Patnaik, and Mr G.M. Banatwala. The House will also have the benefit of the ability and long experience of Mr H.M. Patel, who was a member of the Janata Government and held the portfolio of Finance initially and then of Home. In addition, the new members include Dr. Dutta Samant, metropolitan Bombay's well known labour leader and stormy petrel.

Happily, for the new Lok Sabha, Mr Rajiv Gandhi has made it known that he will do all within his power to make Parliament both effective and purposeful. He is clear that this will not be possible without the active cooperation of the Opposition. Accordingly, he has taken certain actions which have pleased even his critics and roused hopes. In the first place, Parliamentary Affairs has been made the full-time responsibility of one Cabinet Minister. Mr H.K.L. Bhagat has been elevated to Cabinet rank; earlier he was number two to Mr Buta Singh, who proved to be a highly successful Minister of Parliamentary Affairs. At the same time, he has been given two able Ministers of State -- Mrs Margaret Alva and Mr Ghulam Nabi Azad. Secondly, Mr Gandhi has made an unprecedented gesture to the Opposition as proof of his intent. He got Mr Bhagat as the Minister of Parliamentary Affairs to call on top Opposition leaders in Parliament and seek their support and cooperation apart from his decision to invite them individually for talks on major issues confronting the nation.

Outwardly, Parliament has appeared to get on with the job. Inwardly, however, its

health has deteriorated. Not many realise that Parliament provides a forum for an open and honourable struggle for power. Various recognised conventions, rules and procedures essential for the smooth running of Parliament have been broken and defied. Ineffective and shouting has often taken the place of argument and reasoning. Parliamentary privilege has been repeatedly and wantonly abused to sling mud and character assassinate adversaries in the style of the market place. Often, the Opposition has appeared to be the villain of the peace. But it is more sinned against than sinning. True, they shout, create pandemonium and even walk out on occasions. But what are they to do when questions are not answered or truth brazenly suppressed, notwithstanding India's motto of "Satyameva Jayate" which blazons in a neon tube above the Speaker's chair. It needs to be remembered that Parliament's greatest power lies in its ability to ask questions from the Government and, indeed, from the Prime Minister himself.

In sharp contrast to the sorry spectacle in India, the mother of Parliaments continues to grow. New initiatives have been taken and ideas implemented without diluting Westminster's strength in any way. Some eight years ago, the House of Commons, chronically dissatisfied with its procedures and anxious to adapt them to changing demands made upon it, set up a Select Committee on Procedure to make recommendations for the more effective performance of its functions. The Committee, which sat between 1976 and 1978, carried out a broad and significant review of the way the Commons worked and held as many as sixty-eight meetings before finalising its report. Expectedly, the Committee was divided on many details. But it was agreed on many major points, especially the following basic diagnosis: "the balance of advantage between Parliament and Government in the day to day working of the Constitution is now weighted in favour of the Government to a degree... which is inimical to the proper working of parliamentary democracy."

The Committee produced seventy-six recommendations with but one aim: "to enable the House as a whole to exercise effective control and stewardship over ministers and the expanding bureaucracy of the state for which they are answerable." The incoming Government in 1979, headed by Mrs Margaret Thatcher, accepted both the Procedure Committee's order of priorities as well as the essentials of its recommendations, especially in regard to the appointment of permanent select committees. Equally significant was what Mr St. John Steves, the Leader of the House, said in June 1979 while moving for the appointment of the select committees. He saw

them as the means of enabling the Commons "to subject the executive to limitations and control; to protect the liberties of the individual citizen; to defend him against the arbitrary use of power; to focus the mind of the nation on the great issues of the day by the maintenance of continuous dialogue and discussion; and by remaining at the centre of the stage to impose parliamentary conventions or manners on the whole political system".

There is no magic remedy which can restore health to Parliament overnight. The process has to be slow and long. Nevertheless, a meaningful beginning could be made in two ways: by taking a fresh look at the rules of procedure which have reduced Parliament to ineffectiveness and, more important, by adopting the committee system with such modifications as are necessitated by our requirements and traditions. Parliament has neither the time nor is it equipped to take an intensive look at various policies and programmes always. It should normally discuss only matters of general policy and leave the details to be thrashed out in parliamentary committees. But we have ill-advisedly discarded this healthy system. A good few committees were set up in Mavalankar's time. However, these were scrapped and we have now highly-publicised informal Consultative Committees, which have been debunked as "so much trash" by none other than Mr M.N. Kaul, who was Secretary of the Lok Sabha from 1946 to 1964, and by Mr S.L. Shakhder, former Secretary-General.

Much will eventually depend upon Mr Rajiv Gandhi and his approach to the Opposition in practice. (The Opposition can still claim to represent a majority of the voters. The Congress-I polled 49.16 per cent of the votes polled.) The signals from Mr Gandhi so far are undoubtedly encouraging. He is also opposed to the "hulla groups" and will not permit his partymen to indulge in rowdiness. How the new members will conduct themselves is anybody's guess. Fortunately, the Lok Sabha Secretariat, headed by Dr Subhash Kashyap, has organized an orientation course for them-- apart from producing ready reckoners on parliamentary procedures entitled: Abstracts Series. A close circuit TV has also been installed to keep members informed about the happenings on the floor. Ultimately, we need to be clear about the true nature of a healthy and purposeful democracy and of Parliament itself. Mr Rajiv Gandhi has clearly a special responsibility. But the role of the Opposition is no less crucial. Parliament can become strong and effective only if both sides are willing to go by the rules of the game-- and cooperate purposefully.--- INFA

From Self-Reliance to a Developed India: Bharat's Flight of Freedom

LALIT GARGG

August 15 is a glorious day in India's national life—the day when, after a long night of subjugation, the sun of freedom finally rose over our land. In 2026, we are celebrating the 80th anniversary of India's Independence. This is not merely an occasion to recall the glory of our past; it is also a moment for introspection—to ask ourselves how much of the dream for which countless freedom fighters sacrificed everything has been fulfilled, and what kind of India we wish to build by 2047, when the nation celebrates the centenary of Independence. If 1947 gave us political freedom, the goal of 2047 is to make India economically, socially, technologically, strategically and morally self-reliant and developed.

The true meaning of freedom extends far beyond liberation from foreign rule. Freedom becomes meaningful only when every citizen is free from fear, deprivation, illiteracy, unemployment, discrimination and unequal access to opportunities. It becomes meaningful when people understand not only their rights but also their duties; when democracy is not merely a process of winning elections and forming governments, but an instrument of public welfare; when service becomes the spirit of politics, integrity the foundation of public life, and compassion the defining quality of society. The first generation after Independence liberated India from foreign domination; it is the responsibility of the present generation to liberate the nation from dependence, backwardness and a sense of self-doubt.

Over the past few years, an important transformation has become visible in India's journey. From the ramparts of the Red Fort, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has repeatedly given the nation the

message of self-reliance, innovation and youth power. In his 2025 Independence Day address, he particularly called upon young scientists, engineers, talented youth and researchers, asking why India could not develop its own jet engines for fighter aircraft. He urged Indian talent to advance through its own capabilities in areas ranging from semiconductors and space technology to biotechnology and defence. He also emphasized the need to give young people the freedom and opportunities to pursue their ideas and connect their innovations with nation-building. This transformation is not confined to speeches. Today, talent emerging from small cities, towns and villages is creating new identities for India in startups, space, sports, science, digital technology and manufacturing. The Prime Minister has also highlighted from the Red Fort that India's youth have helped the country emerge as one of the world's leading startup ecosystems, with young people from smaller cities and rural areas creating new technological possibilities.

A self-reliant India is the outcome of this changing mindset. Self-reliance does not mean isolating ourselves from the world; it means standing alongside the world with confidence and competing on the strength of our own capabilities. India no longer wants to remain merely a vast market dependent on imports; it is increasingly becoming a nation that manufactures, innovates and exports to the world. Its capabilities in mobile phones, electronics, automobiles, pharmaceuticals, defence equipment, space technology and digital services have grown significantly. Non-petroleum exports have reached new milestones, while India's global competitiveness in services has continued to strengthen.

The most compelling picture of self-reliance can perhaps be seen in the defence sector. India was once counted among the world's major arms

importers, but today both indigenous defence production and defence exports have grown remarkably. In financial year 2025–26, India's defence exports reached a record ₹38,424 crore, an increase of 62.66 per cent over the previous year's ₹23,622 crore. This transformation demonstrates that India is not merely moving towards meeting its own security requirements; it is also acquiring the capability to supply defence equipment to other nations. Even more significantly, India has exported ammunition, weapons, sub-systems, systems and critical components to nearly 80 countries. Defence exports, which stood at only ₹686 crore in 2013–14, rose to ₹23,622 crore in 2024–25—an increase of nearly 34 times in a decade. This is a powerful testimony to India's journey from 'Make in India' to 'Make for the World'.

Yet the real test of a self-reliant India lies not merely in economics and technology. We must build an India that is self-reliant as well as self-disciplined, powerful as well as compassionate, and modern while remaining rooted in its cultural and ethical foundations. Mahatma Gandhi, Lord Mahavira and Lord Buddha taught us that the ultimate purpose of development is human dignity and social harmony. If technology advances while humanity declines, if prosperity increases while compassion diminishes, and if the demand for rights grows while the sense of duty disappears, our freedom will remain incomplete. Even today, we face challenges such as poverty, unemployment, inequality, corruption, social tensions, violence, environmental degradation and the digital divide. Therefore, Independence Day is not merely a celebration of achievements; it is also a solemn occasion to recognize our shortcomings and resolve to overcome them. We must develop a civic culture rooted in truth, integrity, tolerance, disci-

pline, mutual respect and an unwavering commitment to national interest. A democracy is strengthened not merely by Parliament or government, but by the character of its citizens. India needs not only a strong Parliament, but also a strong society and responsible citizens.

India today is one of the most important centres of the world's youthful energy. The goal of a developed India by 2047 is, fundamentally, the goal of its youth, because the young people of today will lead India in 2047. Through initiatives such as 'Viksit Bharat@2047 – Voice of Youth,' young Indians have been invited to become not merely beneficiaries of the future, but agents of transformation. This is why the focus of the 2026 Independence Day campaign must also be on connecting young people with the creation of a strong, self-reliant, innovative and future-ready India. The government's 'MY Bharat' initiative has also given special importance to youth participation. As India moves towards 2047, we should not expect young people merely to seek jobs; we must enable them to become job creators, problem-solvers, innovators and leaders of society. Education must move beyond degrees towards skills, skills towards employment, and employment towards entrepreneurship. The young person in a village should be able to see opportunities in space technology; a girl from a small town should be able to earn global recognition in science and technology; a farmer's son should be able to become an agri-tech entrepreneur; and a young person from an ordinary family should be able to build a startup that creates employment for thousands. This is the picture of the new India.

In the first struggle for Independence, young Indians sacrificed their lives to make the country free. In the struggle to build the India of 2047, the youth must make knowledge, innovation, charac-

ter, hard work and patriotism their weapons. If the generation of 1947 asked, "How can we make India free?", the generation of today must ask, "How can we make India a developed, capable, peaceful and ethically leading nation of the world?" The true meaning of freedom lies in answering this question. We must build an India where the brilliance of development is accompanied by the light of humanity; where scientific progress advances hand in hand with values; where a strong economy is matched by a harmonious society; where India is not dependent on any other nation for its security, while at the same time playing a meaningful role in promoting peace across the world.

When the Tricolour unfurls from the ramparts of the Red Fort today, we should not merely say that India is free. We should also resolve to make that freedom more meaningful, more responsible and more beneficial to every citizen. The vision of a developed India by 2047 is not the dream of any government alone; it must become the collective resolve of 1.4 billion Indians. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has also repeatedly connected the vision of 2047 with the dreams and aspirations of citizens, emphasizing that the building of a developed India will require the participation of every Indian. From the Amrit Kaal of Independence to the 80th milestone of freedom, India has travelled a long and remarkable journey. The next destination is not merely to become an economic power, but to build an India enriched with trust, wisdom, science, values and strength. Our freedom fighters entrusted us with an independent India. It is now our responsibility to hand over to the coming generations an India of which they can be truly proud. This is the new dimension of freedom. This is India's resolve as it marches towards 2047. And this is the truest tribute we can offer to the Tricolour.