

## BUILD A STRONG INDIA

(Speech by Sardar Patel at Island Grounds, Madras, Feb23, 1949)

You want me to talk to you in English. I shall obey your command; but take it from me that it will not be long before you yourselves will have to speak in our national language. If you do not do that, you will drag the country backward. We have to exert our maximum effort to go forward. Unless you do that, I am afraid, you will suffer.

After a prolonged struggle the country has secured freedom, but it is not freedom of the kind that we wanted.

It is not freedom of the kind that the deliverer of the country expected, and to our shame we have to confess that by our folly we have lost him. Now after his going we must do penance and try our best to deserve the freedom that he obtained for us.

Free India is only a child of a year and a half. It has yet to learn to walk; it has to grow, to be strong, and its future depends upon how we build today. Therefore, we have to nurse it carefully; we have to feed, clothe and strengthen it properly. It is our great good fortune that we have here a rare opportunity to build our own country in our own fashion. History will record what we are doing today.

The first requisite for building a strong, free India is unity and peace. If there is no unity in the country, it is bound to go down. Therefore we must first of all adjust our differences and behave in such a manner that there is complete harmony and peace in the country. You cannot expect the government continuously to maintain peace by force. It would be an evil day when in this country the Government has to use repressive measures permanently. Today we are passing through a period of crisis and our young men have, in their impatience, not realised that the freedom which has been obtained with great difficulty is likely to be lost or likely to give no benefit, no advantage, if we do not appreciate that our present duty is to unite and consolidate our freedom.

We lost our leader because we forgot the very first lesson. If we do not realise even after his going that in unity lies our strength, then greater misfortune will befall us.

For unity, we must forget differences of caste and creed and remember that we are all Indians, and all equal. There can be no distinction between man and man in a free country. All must have equal opportunities, equal rights and equal responsibilities. This is difficult of achievement in practice, but we must continuously strive towards that end.

There is one other thing that we have to do to maintain peace and order in this country'. For a few years at least, till we are able to stand on our own legs, we must forget that

we can every now and then threaten the government. We

cannot function if the Government is to be challenged day after day by groups of people who want to have their own way. What they want may be, according to their own honest thinking, very good ; but Gandhiji has put before us the ideal of obtaining what we want by peaceful methods and through truth and non-violence. If people begin to threaten and challenge Government's authority and try to overthrow it to gain their objectives by force, the latter would not be able to do anything constructive. Forces are existing in this country which would create chaos and disorder, which would weaken the country instead of strengthening it.

We in the government have been dealing with the R.S.S. movement. They want that Hindu Rajya or Hindu culture should be imposed by force. No government can tolerate this. There are almost as many Muslims in this country as in the part that has been partitioned away. We are not going to drive them away. It would be an evil day if we started that game, in spite of partition and whatever happens. We must understand that they are going to stay here and it is our obligation and our responsibility to make them feel that this is their country. It is, of course, their responsibility, on the other hand, to discharge their duties as citizens of this country.

We must all understand that partition is behind us. It has to come to stay. I honestly believe that it is good for both the new nations to be rid of a perpetual source of trouble and quarrels. In two hundred years of slavery, the administration created a situation in which we began to drift away from each other. It is good that we have agreed to partition in spite of all its evils ; I have never repented my agreeing to partition. From the experience of one year of joint administration when we had not agreed to partition, I know we would have erred grievously and repented if we had not agreed. It would have resulted in a partition not into two countries but into several bits. Therefore, whatever some people may say, I am convinced and I remain convinced that our having agreed to partition has been for the good of the country.

After partition, we had a huge problem; those who partitioned the country with our concurrence had mental reservations; they thought that partition into two is not the last word and they started their game immediately after partition. They went to Junagadh in the midst of the Kathiawar States, where nearly half the number of princely states are located. From the middle of that group, they took Junagadh and secured its accession to Pakistan. It was the first danger sign, the signal for dividing India again. Fortunately for us, we woke up in time and those who tried that game saw that we are not sleeping. Simultaneously, there was trouble in Kashmir. Although there were many difficulties, the Government of India, despite all the impediments, got the situation under control rapidly. I should say we enhanced our reputation by sending there our army, which, in spite of its complete Indianisation, has proved its mettle and proved its worth. It is a great thing that immediately after the partition of the army and the partition of

the country, our army, manned absolutely by our own people, showed by their strategy, their valour and their organising ability that it can stand comparison with any army in the world. It is a great gain.

Then our neighbour gave us long sleepless nights. Often, people were angry with us and thought we were neglecting the South. They hardly knew our difficulties and our plans. These plans cannot be revealed. What would happen if Hyderabad was invaded from the outside or if Hyderabad attacked us. We had to make preparations all over India. You know only by the results that we have kept our promise to perform the operation in such a manner that there is the least possible bleeding. This is what we have to show for the first year of our freedom.

People are impatient ; they want more wages for labour. Do they think we want to starve labour? Are we foreigners? Some people say we are capitalist agents. One thing I learnt from Mahatma Gandhi is that a public man should not have any property and I can challenge any Socialist or any Communist to play this game with me. But my quarrel is with those who, contrary to the second part of Mahatmaji's advice to US, want to use violence. There should be no terrorism amongst ourselves. So long as people were playing that game when we were under a foreign power, we made allowance for it ; we are paying for it also, because an evil once tolerated grows. That is what we see in Hyderabad.

Why are these Communists creating trouble there? How did they grow? It was because the Hyderabad Government was foolish enough to allow them to grow for its own ends and we had no control over them then to be able to suppress them. And what is it that we see there now? In three or four months' time, 200 or more young Congressmen, their own brothers, have been murdered. Is it a sign of freedom that in the first year of freedom you have 200 Congressmen killed in cold blood in a small area? Once these terrorists are driven out from that area, where will they go? Inside your border. They will harass you ; they will play the same game with you. To the Communists, my appeal may be in vain, because they do not listen. I told them immediately after my release from jail last time that I was prepared to take all the Communists into the Congress, to forget the past and keep the doors open provided they give up violence and cease to draw their inspiration from foreign countries. Even now our offer is open, but if terrorism is the only method they want to employ, because they cannot defeat us at the polls and separate us from the masses of India, then it is our misfortune that we have to put our own dear young men and women into prison or to drive them underground.

That is one section of the people with whom we have to deal ; the other is the R.S.S. I have made them an open offer : 'Change your plans, give up secrecy, eschew communal conflict, respect the Constitution of India, show your loyalty to the Flag and make us believe that we can trust your Avords, To say one thing and to do another is a game which

It will not do. In one year of freedom we have experienced many things and learnt many lessons. Whether they are friends or foes, whether they are our own dear young children, we are not going to allow them to play with fire, so that the house is not set on fire. It would be criminal to allow young men to indulge in acts of violence and destruction, to let the lessons that our neighbouring countries have learnt be wasted on us.

Thus I have spoken to the R.S.S. and to the Communists. Then you have our Sikh friends. Some of them have also begun to threaten us and throw challenges. They are the only community in India which is allowed, with the unanimous voice of the Constituent Assembly, to keep arms. No other community is allowed to keep a sword or a kirpan. Why did we do this? Not in order that they might threaten the government with the use of force. Government is prepared to hand over power to anybody who can take the people with him. But if anybody is going to play false and threaten the popular government, the latter will not fail the people.

These are some of the many forces we are handling simultaneously in the first or second year of our freedom. We know that we have your affection, your love, your confidence, but that is not enough. You have seen our friends in the railways threaten us. They say there is going to be a strike in the railways if we do not meet their demands. We are willing to do so if we can. We would be most anxious to do so. But I must point out to those who are in charge of the railway union that there are millions in this country who do not get as much as the railwaymen get ; let them not create forces which they will not be able to control ; let the railwaymen understand that it is also their duty to share the misfortunes of the people in a period of trouble. Let us tide over the difficulty first. After all, the railway is a nationalised concern ; it is not a private company. Imagine the consequences, in this period of trouble, if railwaymen do not play their part. If there is a strike on the railways and we have to move the army from one place to another with railway communications cut off, what will happen? We continuously need to move food from one place to another swiftly, as we are faced with the threatened famine. If during such a period the South Indian railway, which has threatened to strike, goes on strike, who will starve, and what would be the consequences? When the Railway Federation suspended its strike threat and kept it in abeyance, the other group called them capitalist agents. Now these other people have called for a strike ; they know that they are in a minority and they will not succeed in making the railwaymen go on strike. So their only weapon is terrorism, sabotage, dislocation and disorder.

The Provincial Governments naturally have to tackle these people and immediately the Federation comes in with a statement that it is a wrong policy. I would like to know what is the right policy. When a house is on fire, is it the right policy to throw petrol or kerosene on it, or water?

We are living in very difficult times ; yet the heart of the country is sound. The whole country knows that we are carrying an unbearable burden. Yet if anyone wants to see what the country thinks, let him come to the polls ; I am prepared to accept the challenge. I am prepared to vacate as many seats as you like and have a trial of strength. And if you are able to take the country with you, we shall bless you, because the country is not going to follow any path which is foreign to Indian culture and civilisation and the path that Mahatma Gandhi has shown. But I want to ask you why a few people round about the border of Hyderabad are terrorising the people in Krishna district? It is the fault of Congressmen. Are they united? Why are they quarrelling? Why do they not understand their responsibility? We made all kinds of sacrifices all our lives. Why did we make these sacrifices? Let not South India lose its good name and reputation. I appeal to you to realise what is happening. Did you ever imagine that Gandhiji would hear of a Congressman murdering a Congressman, or a Congressman instigating or helping a Communist to murder another Congressman? If the South Indian Railway is threatened, or if those railwaymen who work in South India are asked to go on strike, have you no responsibility? Everyone in India has to realise that, as a free citizen of India, he must shoulder graver and greater responsibility if India is to take its proper place amongst the nations of the world.

Yesterday, I was presented an address by the Chambers of Commerce. It was in fact a catalogue of grievances. I had to tell them the unpleasant truth that unless everybody in this country, that is businessmen, labourers, industrialists, students and government, all combine and co-operate, we are not going to make progress. We have not yet put democracy on a sound basis. In a democracy, of course, it is the will of the people that prevails, but the people must have experience to make their own free will felt and must have the responsibility to see that everyone is going to fulfil his obligations.

In this country, the greatest need of the hour is food. We import millions of tons of food into our country. We have not got the ships to bring the food that we want. So we pay crores of rupees as freight charges simply to bring the food here. We have not enough boats even to catch fish. We have no mercantile marine. We have nothing left in this country ; for the last 200 years it has been bled white ; during the war years in particular, every ounce of blood has been taken out. Our railway system has been completely disorganised. The Transport Member makes tremendous efforts to set it right. But the railways are like a decrepit old widow. Railway sleepers and rails were taken out and sent to various theatres of war. We cannot replace the wagons which have been overused for so many years. We cannot get locomotives. We cannot make them here ; we have yet to establish factories for meeting the requirements of our country.

We must have a good mercantile marine ; so we are

building a fine port at Vizagapatnam. But it is only a beginning. A small country like Portugal has got pockets on our soil ; we also have French colonies. Our friends in these areas who are fighting for freedom along with us ask us to first settle this question ; others talk of the wages for labour ; and still others want us to deal with the businessmen first and to give them their due. The businessmen are frightened of the talk of nationalisation. They say ; 'Unless you give us conditions in which industry can thrive, we cannot invest money or we cannot get money. So production has been at a standstill. We cannot produce more wealth in this country. The Communists and the Socialists say : let us first divide whatever is left and be all poor. But if you do not produce anything, then neither you nor any other section of the people will have anything. Therefore, so far as food is concerned, I have a grievance against Congressmen and against those people who were in the Congress and today are preaching to peasants not to help this government in procurement and to ask for more money. They are no better than the other people who say: 'Do not work, stop work, go slow, ask for more wages.' Because if there is no procurement, then the only course open to us is to import more and more, and importing more is nothing but economic ruin of this country.

If we in this country realize our responsibility, there will be no dearth of food. Of course, there is scarcity to a certain extent ; the shortage of food according to our statistics is 7 per cent ; in a vast country like this, if we act up to our responsibilities, this is negligible. Many people waste their food and cook more than they should. Those people should put a stop to this wastage. Then we should produce more food. Every inch of land that is available should be used for growing vegetables, fruit and other food. Wherever there is waste land which can be reclaimed, it would be the duty of government, local bodies, zamindars, and every citizen of India to use all his resources in the immediate task of growing more food on it. Thirdly, whatever surplus you have got, give it to the Government. When your neighbours are starving, do not be selfish. That is not the way which Gandhiji showed us. That is not our culture. Let not our neighbour starve ; we must share his misery. Educate the peasants ; tell them it is a religious duty to give all their surplus for government procurement, so that Government can decrease the imports that are being made.

There are many Congressmen who are indifferent to this matter. They think that elections are coming and they will be unpopular if they ask for procurement. A greater crime is committed by those who teach the peasants to ask for higher prices and not to give crops for procurement.

That is a crime against humanity. A real Congressman would say: 'My friends, our neighbours are dying; our country is being ruined ; let us share the suffering of our brothers.' I am saying hard things to Congressmen because they have a greater responsibility, greater influence and a greater hold on the people.

Let us all put our heads as well as our hands together, tighten up our belts and be prepared to share the sufferings for a while. It is only for a while, because I assure you that the economy of the country is sound ; the heart of the country is sound ; there is immense wealth in the country. The country is full of mineral resources and wealth. We have simply to use our brains and our resources to take them out and use them. But it will take time ; it is not an easy thing. We shall require experts, machinery and capital goods. If we tide over this short period, India will be flowing with milk and honey.

I am extremely touched by the affection that you have shown me. I have said some things which may be harsh, but however bitter they may be, they are a dose of medicine. In return for your affection, I can only ask you to forgive me if I have said anything harsh ; take it as a piece of advice which comes from an honest and humble servant.

(Scanned and OCRd from FOR A UNITED INDIA, SPEECHES OF SARDAR PATEL 1947-1950, PUBLICATIONS DIVISION, MINISTRY OF INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING, GOVERNMENT OF INDIA, First Published: 1949)