

My distinguished colleagues, former Judges, Advocate Generals of the States of Punjab & Haryana, Judicial Officers, President, Office Bearers and members of the Punjab & Haryana Bar Association, Chairman and members of Bar Council, Punjab & Haryana, employees of the High Court, ladies and gentleman.

2. My colleagues and I extend to all of you our warm greetings and good wishes and welcome you to celebrate Independence Day with us.

3. At this time of year it is not unusual to go back to Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru's great speech "*Tryst with Destiny*". Every word spoken, every sentiment, hope and desire expressed, every warning given, every pledge suggested in that speech, is as relevant today as it was when it was made 68 years ago.

4. Independence Day is indeed a day to celebrate. It is a day to celebrate the independence achieved by our great leaders and statesmen and all the people of this country in a massive collective effort through a long but responsible struggle, with well measured restraint. It is a day to rejoice about what we have achieved, what we

are achieving and to look forward in anticipation to what we can achieve. But it is also a day to ponder about what we could have achieved and what we are capable of achieving.

5. It is important to highlight three things about our independence.

- (A) FIRSTLY, it was gained as a result of a collective effort. The freedom movement gained impetus after Gandhiji turned it into a collective movement of the people of India, instead of restricting it to a small group of professionals and intellectuals.
- (B) SECONDLY, it was not freedom or independence alone that was gained on 15th August, 1947. The independence movement did not result in our country merely gaining freedom for freedom sake or freedom in a vacuum. That would never have been sufficient. It may not even have been desirable. Our freedoms fighters gained for us freedom with well founded and solid institutions to constitute, preserve and strengthen India into a sovereign, socialist secular Democratic Republic. They obtained for us freedom with order and a civilized society governed by the rule of law. We take for granted what millions all over the world yearn desperately for.

(C) THIRDLY, freedom was not gained and merely gifted to the people of this country. It was placed in trust with every citizen entrusting them with the responsibility of preserving and protecting it and moulding it keeping in mind the ever changing requirements of the people of our country and then passing it on intact from generation to generation.

6. We have come a long way politically, socially and economically. India has excelled in almost every field of human endeavour, whether it is science & technology, finance & industry, politics, education, art, culture and if I may be so presumptuous as to add - law. While our successes have been founded on our values, traditions, ethos and culture, they have mostly been the result of a collective effort through co-operation.

7. The diversity of our country has been its charm and strength. It is also one of our greatest challenges. To preserve it and to tap it wisely and responsibly is also one of our greatest challenges. Not for a moment can we take it for granted. We can either build and flourish on it or let it drag us down. Despite the difficulties and the strain on this count, our democracy and commitment to remain a secular State has been strong enough in the balance to ensure that our diversity has been our strength. Despite aberrations it has inculcated

in us the values of mutual respect and tolerance and added to the richness of our culture, heritage and intellect.

8. We are passing through good times and bad. There are achievements that we are rightly jubilant about but there are dangers that we must guard against. It is believed by many that we allowed ourselves to be ruled to a large measure not because we were weak but because there was no internal power strong enough to control the whole of India.

9. We remember and acknowledge with gratitude the contributions and sacrifices of the leaders and freedom fighters who over the years fought for independence, fought for a cause that enables us to live in freedom. We remember our statesmen and acknowledge with gratitude what they gave us. Whilst revering a few that fought for freedom by name, we do not forget the others who did the same.

10. It is a day to convey our eternal gratitude and deep indebtedness to our armed forces, paramilitary forces and internal security forces. Words can never convey what we feel about you and our gratitude to you for it is on account of your personal sacrifices and commitments to a large measure that our democracy survives and we live in relative safety and freedom.

11. Each of us has the responsibility to ensure and strengthen the country and every one of its institutions. Our institution which is responsible for the administration of justice is looked up to more and more not merely to safeguard the rights of our citizens and all those who visit this country howsoever briefly, but also to enhance the quality of their lives. We have a very major and significant role to play in renewing the pledge. The judiciary is constantly called upon to deal with a variety of problems and to meet new intellectual challenges far beyond what was imagined almost seven decades ago.

Mounting arrears though a cause for concern is also an encouraging sign that the people have an abiding faith in the judiciary and choose to live by the rule of law. To reinforce this faith, it is necessary that those of us who are a part of the justice delivery system lead by example.

12. In my Republic Day speech, I mention that I was informed by all my colleagues that the Bar of the Punjab & Haryana High Court has always been co-operative. I mentioned that assurances were given to me by several members of the Bar that this will continue to be so. Eight months to the day after I took charge as the Acting Chief Justice of this great High Court I am happy to note that my information was correct and that the assurances were kept.

I can only say what I said then, that with a co-operative Bar and a dedicated judiciary the future of the justice delivery system in the States of Punjab and Haryana and in the Union Territory of Chandigarh is secure.

13. No independence day is complete without remembering with reverence the father of our nation, Mahatma Gandhi, who gave everything and more to make independence a reality. Pandit Nehru was justifiably confident that India would never allow to be blown out the torch of freedom held aloft by Gandhiji that lit up the darkness, which surrounded us then, however, high the wind or stormy tempest.

14. Today is a day when we must renew the national pledge formulated by Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru:-

“The service of India means the service of the millions who suffer. It means the ending of poverty and ignorance and poverty and disease and inequality of opportunity. The ambition of the greatest man of our generation has been to wipe every tear from every eye. That may be beyond us, but as long as there are tears and sufferings, so long our work will not be over.”

- JAI HIND -