

Twenty-five years of freedom

A balance-sheet

by J.R.D. Tata

Mr J.R.D. Tata, Chairman of a number of Tata Companies, is one of our most respected industrialists. At the age of 69 he looks back at the last 25 years of India's achievements and disappointments in a recent address to the shareholders of the Tata Iron and Steel Company.

Failure

We may derive some satisfaction from these significant achievements, but we cannot overlook the fact that with all the growth and sophistication of our industrial apparatus, we are still today a small industrial power with about one per cent of the world's steel output, one half per cent of the world's exports, and producing in one year no more than what Japan produces in one month; ^rnot the fact that the ^rone per cent annual increase in our per capita income is only one-fourth of the target we set before us when we started planning in 1951; that the great majority of our people continue to live in deep poverty and distress; that unemployment or under-employment continues to rise each year and that, despite the expenditure of some sixty-five thousand crores on development during these 25 years, the standard of living of the bulk of our people continues to be amongst the lowest in the world.

Last, but by no means least, we have failed to make any real dent in the rate of growth of our population which, in these brief 25 years alone, has increased by a staggering 200 million, ~~xx~~ almost the total population of the United States, Western Europe or Soviet Russia.

Looking ahead, however, there is no reason to be disheartened or pessimistic about the next 25 years. We now have a versatile industrial

base capable of rapid expansion, wide-ranging skills and managerial expertise, a basically sound economy which demonstrated its resilience by the manner in which it absorbed the severe shocks of the past year, and, equally important, we now have a united Government under strong and bold leadership. With such a combination of favourable factors, we undoubtedly have the capability of achieving much faster progress than in the past.

Tragically, these twenty-five years began and ended not only with a major political transformation of our sub-Continent, ~~But~~ with great human upheavals, including war, which on both occasions compelled some ten million people to flee in terror from their homes to seek refuge in another land, and brought death to thousands and misery to millions. The recent Agreement signed at Simla by our Prime Minister and the President of Pakistan gives hope that this grievous chapter in the relations between our two countries is now closed forever, and that peace, growing understanding and co-operation will henceforth replace the conflict and confrontation which for twenty-five years caused so much suffering to so many on both sides.

In this last of the twenty-five years India bore a burden of refugee relief of a magnitude that no country in the world had ever been called upon to bear; it helped in the liberation of a nation of over 70 million people; it fought a victorious war -- mercifully a short one; it bore with remarkable equanimity and success the severe blows which these events inflicted upon its economy; it emerged as a major factor in the Asian power balance, and achieved, under Indira Gandhi, a degree of political integration and stability equalled only by that achieved under Jawaharlal Nehru in the early years of our Independence.

It is only right that on such an important occasion we should briefly take stock of our achievements as well as of our failures during these twenty-five momentous years.

Achievements and ...

Politically, we have emerged from our many trials and tribulations as one of the most stable developing countries in the world, confounding in the process the many in India and abroad who feared, or hoped, that we could not survive as a united and politically strong nation.

Militarily, we have achieved a capability in manpower, equipment and expertise of a high order and certainly adequate to our defence needs against all but great powers, as well as a capacity for large-scale production of sophisticated military hardware without parallel in developing countries.

Economically, we have more than doubled our foodgrains production, more than trebled our industrial production, increased by 25 per cent our real per capita income which had actually fallen in the first fifty years of the century and increased the life-span of our people from 31 to 52 years and their literacy rate from 16.6 per cent to over 29 per cent.