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Title : Further discussion on the motion moved by Shri Madhusudan Mistry and seconded by Shri Jyotiraditya M. Scindia and amendments thereto moved on 20 February, 2006(Amendments negatived and discussion concluded).

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Now, we take up item no. 6 – Motion of Thanks on the President's Address.

Hon. Prime Minister.

...(Interruptions)

THE PRIME MINISTER (DR. MANMOHAN SINGH): Mr. Deputy-Speaker, Sir, I, on behalf of my Government, rise to join the hon. Members in conveying our sincere thanks to the hon. Rashtrapatiji for his Address to Parliament. I also thank the hon. Members for their valuable comments. I assure the House that we will take note of the many genuine concerns raised regarding the Government's policies and programmes. I am also grateful for the many valuable suggestions made on how we can improve governance and address the concerns of our people. I greatly value these suggestions and we will try and address as many of these concerns as possible. ...(Interruptions)

Mr. Deputy-Speaker, Sir, the President's Address to Parliament is the most important statement of policy that the Government places before this august House at the beginning of every year. It is a statement in which the policies and priorities of the Government are outlined. It is not an exhaustive account of every concern that we have, nor a statement on every issue. However, it offers a comprehensive survey of the Government's policies and priorities.

I do believe that the hon. Rashtrapatiji has presented before us an important statement that should make every Indian proud and reassured. Proud, because India is once again on the march, as a secular Republic, as a self-confident nation. Never before have our prospects been as bright as they are today. Reassured, because this march is not just of a few, but of all. Our pledge to ensure that our growth process is inclusive, caring and equitable has imparted a new sense of belonging to all sections of our society. ...(Interruptions)

Mr. Deputy-Speaker, Sir, our Government came to power on a pledge to care for the *aam aadmi*, on a pledge to make India shine, but shine for all. Each of the development and employment-oriented programmes we have launched has this single objective in mind. The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, the Mid-Day Meal programme, the ICDS programme, Bharat Nirman covering rural roads, drinking water, irrigation, electricity, housing and telecom, the National Rural Health Mission; the Jawaharlal Nehru Urban Renewal Mission, the initiatives we have taken in infrastructure development, in reviving the manufacturing sector, in reviving agricultural growth – every initiative has been aimed at ensuring that while we accelerate growth, we do so in an equitable, fair and just manner^[h2].

This was the essence of the President's Address. If some of the hon. Members sitting in the Opposition have difficulty in appreciating this, I do not blame them. During their tenure in office, they were unable to present such a comprehensive account of development and better governance. Their focus was on a socially divisive agenda, on a non-developmental agenda, on an agenda that mired the country in a low growth syndrome and an agenda that was backward looking....(Interruptions)

Mr. Deputy-Speaker, Sir, even now, they continue to raise issues of no consequence to the people in this vital debate. Every now and then, a question is raised about Prime Ministerial authority as if we live in some totalitarian system, in some fascist State, where authority has to be visibly asserted to command compliance. That may be the culture and outlook of those who keep raising this issue of authority. Sir, India is a proud democracy. Ours is a Parliamentary Democracy. There is Parliament. There is a Council of Ministers and there are other institutions of democratic governance. There are political parties. The Prime Minister functions within a set of rules and a framework of governance. Maybe, those who raise this issue are unaware of this framework. Maybe, they think other parties function like theirs, allowing shadowy organizations to interfere in the work of elected Governments. That has not been the culture of the Congress Party....(Interruptions)

Mr. Deputy-Speaker, Sir, this issue of strength and weakness is raised to deflect public attention from the real issues that concern our people. This Government has delivered eight per cent growth. We are seeing the highest savings rate of 29 per cent ever seen in our history and a record investment rate of 31 per cent. The country is on the verge of crossing an eight per cent growth rate this year. If we sustain this for the next few years, it is possible that we can eliminate poverty, ignorance and disease which afflict millions of our people. This Government has economically and socially empowered Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, religious and linguistic

minorities, farmers and the working class, the unemployed and the poor. This Government has revived investment and generated employment. This Government has ensured that India stands tall in the comity of nations. This Government has charted a new path. It is the progress along this path that has been spelt out in the President's Address. My authority derives from this record of performance. I secure my strength from my work. ...(*Interruptions*)

Mr. Deputy-Speaker, Sir, I wholeheartedly join the hon. Members who have expressed their thanks to the Rashtrapati. Sir, several Members have drawn our attention to the importance of proper implementation of various programmes we have launched, especially the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. I am grateful to them for emphasizing the importance of implementation. Our Government will pay utmost attention to the proper implementation of welfare schemes and ensure that intended beneficiaries, in fact, do benefit from these schemes. I must draw the attention of the House to the fact that it is precisely with this objective in mind, and to empower citizens and civil society groups that we have enacted the Right to Information Act, 2005. I hope this power will be exercised in the right spirit to ensure better governance at the grassroots. We will be closely monitoring the implementation of these programmes and work closely with State Governments to achieve this[m3].

Sir, many Members have raised the issue of regional imbalances. Our Government will ensure that the least developed districts and backward regions of the country get the attention and the investment they require. The Backward Regions Grant Fund which will be coming into operation this year, I must point out that most of the programmes and schemes that we have launched, are biased in favour of the more backward areas in their design. This is of course as it should be so that these regions can catch up with the relatively better off neighbours in a short period. Shri Prabhunath Singh has mentioned that the Sam Vikas Yojana has no involvement of people's representatives. The RSVY is being subsumed under the Backward Region Grant Fund which will be implemented through the Panchayati Raj Institutions. ...(*Interruptions*)

Sir, just as important is the issue of having equitable development and ensuring that all sections of society enjoy the benefits of growth. The Bill to give land rights to tribals in forest areas, the filling of the backlog of government jobs for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, the range of legal measures for women's rights – these are all steps towards ensuring the empowerment of all marginalised and weaker groups.

Sir, many hon. Members, Shri Basu Deb Acharia and others, have drawn attention to the difficulties being faced by farmers in different parts of the country. Our Government has given top priority to agriculture and farming and a number of steps have been taken which will show results in years to come. While the flow of agricultural credit has improved, I do recognise that credit to farmers, particularly small and marginal farmers is still a matter of concern. We have a problem of both excessive indebtedness and dependence on moneylenders for a high proportion of credit. I believe that the existing institutional arrangements are possibly inadequate in their current form to address the problems afflicting farmers fully. We are committed to finding a solution to this vexing problem. We will try to improve access to credit at a lower cost to farmers. The Minister of Finance will be addressing this matter in his budget speech. Shri Prabhunath Singh has raised the issue of giving the fertiliser subsidy directly to farmers. That is an idea worth considering. I have asked the Minister of Agriculture to prepare a package for addressing the problems of marginal farmers.

Several Members have expressed concern about rising prices. Let me assure the House that we are monitoring the price situation closely. As *Rashtrapati* said in his Address, we have been able to keep prices under check despite unprecedented pressure on account of rising world oil prices. On pricing of petroleum products, we will continue to pursue a judicious policy keeping in mind the needs of the consumer, the requirements of energy security and the health of our public sector oil companies. I must assure hon. Members that the decision to import wheat was taken as a precautionary measure and to ensure that we maintain a minimum level of bufferstocks. This decision will benefit consumers without hurting farmers. We do not need lessons from the NDA on how to care for our farmers! ...(*Interruptions*)

A suggestion has been made by Shri Basu Deb Acharia in favour of the universalisation of the public distribution system. I sincerely believe that it is the duty of any Government, faced with the constraint of resources and the limitations of administration, to ensure that the genuinely poor across the country benefit from our public distribution system. It is only after we are able to address the needs of the poor that can we examine the universalisation of PDS. As for food security, that is being addressed through the Rural Employment Guarantee, the universalisation of the Mid Day Meal and the ICDS programmes and expanding the number of Antodaya cards. Over the last two years, an additional 1.8 lakh ICDS centres have been sanctioned, 12 crore children are being provided mid day meals and an additional one crore Antodaya cards have been issued. These are important milestones in ensuring food security[R4].

Mr. Deputy-Speaker, Sir, some hon. Members have commented that Bharat Nirman is a repackaging of existing schemes. Sir, I beg to differ. I urge the hon. Members to apprise themselves of this initiative. Never before has such a concerted and planned initiative

been launched for rural infrastructure development. Bharat Nirman is a governmental initiative that derives its inspiration from the Rashtrapati's PURA vision. I sincerely believe that through Bharat Nirman, we will be able to transform our rural economy.

Sir, some hon. Members have raised questions regarding the selection of cities for the National Urban Renewal Mission. Let me assure the hon. Members that rational criteria have been adopted for selection of cities. These cities fall into three categories – cities with a population of over four million, between one and four million and other State capitals and cities selected for their importance as heritage and tourist destinations. States are free to change cities in the last category as per their priorities. *â€¦ (Interruptions)*

Mr. Deputy-Speaker, Sir, the President's Address gives a detailed account of the important steps taken by our Government to improve the quality of infrastructure in the country. It is this effort that has contributed to the unprecedented increase in the rate of investment in the economy in the last two years. The rate of investment is at an all-time high of 31 per cent of the GDP. The figures in individual sectors speak for themselves. Roads, railways, airports and airlines, ports and shipping, telecommunication – each and every sector is on a high growth path, buzzing with activity. I am sure, all this will contribute to a further acceleration of income and employment growth. *â€¦ (Interruptions)*

Sir, I would like to take this opportunity to draw the attention of the House to the remarkable turnaround achieved by the Indian Railways in the last two years under the leadership of my colleague Shri Lalu Prasad. They have improved their physical and financial performance through excellent operational management – capable of adding 100 million tonnes of capacity with existing rolling stock. He will be apprising the House of these in his Budget speech. Under his dynamic leadership, Indian Railways have entered a new era of progress, modernisation and growth.

Mr. Deputy-Speaker, Sir, a number of hon. Members have voiced concerns about FDI in retail. I would like to assure the House that we will not act in haste in this matter. So far, only FDI by single brand chains has been allowed. This is an extremely narrow category which, in any case, is present in the country through franchises. The larger issue is FDI in any form of retail. We will examine this issue in all its dimensions including its effect on livelihoods and discuss this widely before taking any decision. There is no hurry on this front. *â€¦ (Interruptions)*

Sir, the issue of the dissolution of the Bihar Assembly and the subsequent judgement of the hon. Supreme Court has been raised by the hon. Members. There have been comments on the role of the Governor. I would not like to go into the merits of the judgement and we respect the wisdom and decision of the hon. Supreme Court in arriving at the conclusion it did. Having said that, I will only say that on the issue of the unconstitutionality of the dissolution, the Court did not arrive at a unanimous verdict. Three judges were of the view that the proclamation dissolving the Assembly was unconstitutional whereas two judges held a different view. Therefore, it is obvious that in this complicated case, there could be an honest difference of opinion. This has to be kept in view in arriving at a conclusion about the conduct of the Governor or the Union Cabinet.

After the judgement of the hon. Supreme Court, the Governor decided to tender his resignation out of his own volition. In any case, the subsequent elections to the Bihar Assembly and the formation of a stable Government have made the debate infructuous [\[krr5\]](#).

Sir, many hon. Members have expressed concerns about unemployment. I must add here that the overall impact of all our initiatives will be to generate more and more employment and to modernise the economy. The NREGA alone will be a major initiative. In addition, the huge investments we are facilitating in infrastructure development and industry will create jobs. Our Government is deeply committed to the welfare of all our working people, not just members of the organised trade unions but also working people in the unorganised sector, in rural and urban areas. Some Members may have a greater concern for organised workers, but our Government is equally committed to all workers, in all sectors of the economy. *â€¦ (Interruptions)*

I would like to take this opportunity to once again re-assure our people that our Government is committed to the welfare of all our citizens. I welcome the concern expressed during the debate on the status of women. Our Government condemns the practice of female foeticide. We are also committed to one-third reservation for women in Parliament and State Legislatures.

Many hon. Members have raised the issue of internal security situation in the country. The Rashtrapati's Address has given a detailed account of the measures being taken by our Government in Jammu and Kashmir and the North-East. We are firm in our conviction that violence of any kind is not in consonance with the principles of our democracy and way of life, and will be dealt with firmly. Terrorism will not be given any quarter and will be treated with a firm hand. At the same time, we are willing to engage in a dialogue with all groups inside and outside the electoral system in all parts of the country if they are willing to abjure violence and come to a peaceful resolution of issues. Our history, our culture and our legacy provide adequate space for such peaceful resolution. Results of this are visible in Jammu and Kashmir where not only has violence come down substantially, but there is a ray of hope in the eyes of the

people - hope about a peaceful and prosperous future. The Development Plan for Jammu and Kashmir is under implementation and we will see a power surplus, dynamic and vibrant economy in the State in the years to come. ...(*Interruptions*)

Even in the case of naxalism, we are committed to dealing with violence firmly while addressing the root causes of disaffection arising out of poverty, landlessness and deprivation.

As for the North-East, Shri Konyak, Shri Bwiswmuthiary and others have raised issues regarding the development of the region. This region has immense potential, but it has yet to be realised. We are investing in the infrastructure of the region. We have started work on the first ever coal-based thermal power projects in the region in Assam and Tripura. We are building railways as national projects, connecting Manipur as well. There is a special roads programme underway for the North-East. A new Industrial Policy has been prepared and shall be approved shortly. Better infrastructure and connectivity will lead to the industrialisation of this region, resulting in more jobs and faster growth. ...(*Interruptions*)

Shri Owaisi, Dr. Shafiqur Rahman Barq and others have drawn attention to the problems of Muslim minorities. I would like to once again reiterate our commitment to the welfare of our minorities, particularly the Muslim minorities. The creation of a Ministry of Minority Affairs is to ensure that their problems get focused attention. No less, no more. And for any reasoned discourse or debate on the subject of their development, we need to have reliable, accurate data on their economic and social status. This is what the Justice Sachar Committee has set out to do. The Committee will complete its work and we will discuss it in the House in detail. It is unfortunate that an academic exercise, which will ensure better targeting of development programmes, is being given an unfortunate tilt.

Let me assure the Members of this House that the Armed Forces will continue to be apolitical, secular, professional and merit based. I urge the hon. Members to make a distinction between empowerment and appeasement. Our Government, as indeed any democratic Government, is committed to the empowerment of all and the appeasement of none.

As for the Aligarh Muslim University, we are committed to retaining its minority character[reporter6].

Mr. Deputy-Speaker, Sir, on the specific issue of certain disparaging cartoons appearing in some publications abroad, I share the concern expressed in the House. Our Government is deeply concerned about the growing controversy over the publication of cartoons that have offended the Muslim Community worldwide. At the time these offending cartoons were first published, our outrage at this had been conveyed to the Danish Government both in New Delhi and through our Ambassador in Copenhagen in October 2005 itself. While expressing our distress over such lack of sensitivity to the religious sentiments of people, we urged that the concerned newspaper should express its apologies, and the Danish Government should ensure that such actions did not happen again.

We condemn all actions which hurt the religious sentiments of any community, and are of the view that such activities be dealt with seriously and firmly. We have the greatest regard and respect for all faiths, and are committed to protecting their rights and beliefs, to preserving and strengthening the secular nature of our society. ...(*Interruptions*)

India's commitment to religious harmony and tolerance is unshakeable, and actions that cause hurt to the sentiments of any section of our people are not acceptable. I also urge all our political and religious leaders to exercise utmost restraint and not inflame public opinion. We must uphold our proud tradition as a democracy of conveying our point of view in a reasonable manner. ...(*Interruptions*)

Mr. Deputy-Speaker, Sir, there has been considerable comment in the debate in this House on our foreign policy orientation. I have had several opportunities in the last one year to speak at length on many of these issues. I urge hon. Members to appreciate the fact that by and large we have had a national consensus on our foreign policy orientation, and that has given us great strength in dealing with the world. I sincerely urge all our political parties to respect this tradition, so that the hands of the Government are strengthened in dealing with the world. ...(*Interruptions*)

Sir, I have had the opportunity recently of articulating my vision of foreign policy - when I laid the foundation stone of the Jawaharlal Nehru Bhawan- Panditji's vision of India was deeply embedded in our civilisational inheritance. Our civilisation has a message for the world that informs our foreign policy vision. That has been a message of unity in diversity of pluralism, inclusiveness - and- secularism. ...(*Interruptions*)

Sir, we have worked hard to create the space needed to have the freedom to make policy choices in an increasingly inter-dependent world. The means we adopt to pursue our enduring objectives of peace, national security and development will, of course, change from time to time. They will have to be evolved in response to the changing reality of an ever-changing world. While the instruments of our policy and the tactics and strategy we adopt may change with time, the values in which they are embedded are universal and will remain true for all time.

Sir, this House has my solemn assurance that in pursuing our foreign policy; in ensuring our national security; and in promoting our

economic development, our Government will always have the nation's interest uppermost in our mind. I do believe we have the trust and confidence of the people of India[ak7].

Sir, the world today views India with great regard and respect. This is because the people of our country have demonstrated to the world that they are second to none. Our civilisational inheritance, our pluralism, our culture of tolerance and inclusiveness are the envy of many nations. No Indian need feel any sense of inferiority or insecurity in today's world. India stands tall and we stand proud as an open society and an open economy. I am sure hon. Members rejoice in this sense of self-confidence of our people....(Interruptions)

This sense of national pride was reinvigorated during the recent visits of His Majesty the King of Saudi Arabia and the President of France when they both paid tribute to our civilisational inheritance and our emerging economic strength. It is with this sense of self-confidence that we now look forward to the visit of the President of the United States.

Mr. Deputy-Speaker, Sir, I would like to assure the House once again that I will take a closer look at all the suggestions made during the debate and ensure that our Government is alive to the concerns of Parliament. I thank all hon. Members who participated in the debate....(Interruptions)

I would like this Motion of Thanks on the President's Address to be passed unanimously. â€¦. (Interruptions)

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: A number of amendments have been moved by Members to the Motion of Thanks. Shall I put all the amendments to the vote of the House together or does any hon. Member want any particular amendment to be put separately?

...(Interruptions)

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: I shall now put all the amendments together to the vote of the House.

The amendments were put and negatived.

...(Interruptions)

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: I shall now put the main motion to the vote of the House. The questions is:

"That an Address be presented to the President in the following terms:

That the Members of the Lok Sabha assembled in this Session are deeply grateful to the President for the Address which he has been pleased to deliver to both Houses of Parliament assembled together on February 16, 2006."

The motion was adopted.

...(Interruptions)

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: The House stands adjourned to meet again at 2 p.m.

12.32 hrs.

The Lok Sabha then adjourned till Fourteen of the Clock.

14.00 hrs.

The Lok Sabha re-assembled at Fourteen of the Clock.

(Mr. Deputy-Speaker *in the Chair*)

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Item No. 7 - Discussion under Rule 193.

Shri C.K. Chandrappan.

...(Interruptions)

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Nothing should be recorded except those hon. Members who get my permission to speak.

(Interruptions)*

14.01 hrs.

*(At this stage, Shri Srichand Kriplani and some other hon. Members
came and stood on the floor near the Table.)*

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: The House stands adjourned to meet tomorrow the 24th February, 2006 at 11.00 a.m.

14.03 hrs.

The Lok Sabha then adjourned till Eleven of the Clock

on Friday, February 24, 2006 / Phalgun 5, 1927 (Saka).

* Not Recorded.

[c1]Fd by b1

[h2]Cd. by e1

[m3]ctd. by f1

[R4]cd. by g1.e

[krr5]contd bh h1

[reporter6]contd by J

[ak7]cd.. by K1