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17.31 hrs.

VALEDICTORY REFERENCES

Title: Valedictory References on the conclusion of the Second Session of the Fourteenth Lok Sabha.

MR. SPEAKER: Hon. Members, the Second Session, which is the first Budget Session of the Fourteenth Lok Sabha, which commenced on 5th July, 2004, and was scheduled to conclude on 3rd September, 2004, is coming to a premature close today. I am sorry that the Members of the Opposition are absent today.

...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: The Railway and the General Budgets for 2004-2005 were presented on the 6th and 8th July, 2004 respectively.

As the hon. Members are aware, the Departmentally Related Standing Committees have been restructured on the basis of the recommendations of the Rules Committee. The Standing Committees have been increased in number, their jurisdiction re-defined, and the strength of the Committees has been restricted to a total of 31 Members each. This restructuring is intended to bring about an improvement in the examination and scrutiny of the Demands for Grants of the Ministries and Departments and would, in the long run, prove to be a welcome step in the direction of ensuring effective Parliamentary scrutiny of executive actions as envisaged in our Constitutional scheme.

Another major development in this direction is the fact that the Government have expressed their in-principle agreement to the Speaker's proposal for making of periodic statements, by the hon. Ministers concerned, in the House regarding the status of the implementation of the recommendations contained in the Reports of Parliamentary Committees, and this has already been approved today by the Rules Committee. I am thankful to the Government for this.

The House took a recess from 26th July, 2004 to 13th August, 2004 for enabling the Standing Committees to examine and report back to the House on the Demands for Grants of various Ministries and Departments. Unfortunately, the constitution of the Standing Committees, in their re-structured form, could be completed only on the 5th August, 2004. Consequently, with a view to giving

some more time to the Committees to complete their work, it was decided that the initial week following the re-assembly of the House on 16th August, 2004 would be devoted to discussing matters of public importance, and the financial business taken up thereafter.

I wish to acknowledge that despite severe constraints of time, under which the Standing Committees had to function, they have performed commendably by presenting to the House as many as 38 Reports on the Demands for Grants of various Ministries and Departments.

During the Session, the House had some long and fruitful debates on a few important matters of urgent public importance. There were five discussions in all under rule 193. These related to the situation in Iraq; removal of four Governors; the flood and drought situation in the country; the issue of shortage of power in the country; and the problems faced by the jute industry, though it remained incomplete due to reasons known to all.

Four important matters were raised by way of Calling Attention, in response to which the Ministers concerned made statements. In addition, as many as sixteen statements were made by the Ministers on various other important subjects.

As regards Private Members' Business, 16 Private Members' Bills were introduced.

A Private Member's Resolution urging the Government to formulate a policy of reservations for the weaker sections in the private sector received support from all sections of the House before it was withdrawn.

Out of the 461 Starred Questions admitted during the Session, only 48 Questions in all could be answered orally in view of the disruption of the Question Hour on many of the days. Thus, on an average, only about two Starred Questions could be answered orally per day. 4,455 Unstarred Questions were also admitted.

Hon. Members raised 220 matters under rule 377. Besides, nearly 137 Members made Special Mentions on matters of urgent public importance during what is called the 'Zero Hour'.

The current Lok Sabha is composed of as many as 227 first time Members. With a view to acquainting them with the functioning of the House, the Bureau of Parliamentary Studies and Training organised an orientation programme for their benefit and also took them on a guided tour of the Parliament House Complex.

A major decision taken towards promoting transparency in the functioning of the House, worthy of mentioning here, relates to the direct telecast of the proceedings after the Question Hour.

Hon. Members, the House was scheduled to have 30 sittings spread over 180 hours. By adjourning prematurely today, we are foregoing six days of scheduled sittings. Of the 24 days the House actually sat during the Session, we lost over 47 hours of valuable time due to disorderly scenes resulting in forced adjournments of the House. More disturbingly, on as many as seven days of the Session, the business transacted by the House was almost negligible. Though the time lost was compensated to the extent of over 13 hours by the House sitting late, this is insignificant as compared to the time we lost due to disturbances.

Hon. Members, I must express my great sadness that the Railway Budget as well as the Demands for Grants in respect of the General Budget and the Finance Bill, 2004 had to be passed without discussion owing to the continued disturbances and forced adjournments of the House. In spite of the Chair's humble efforts and repeated earnest appeals made in the House and also during several meetings held with the Leaders, we could not discuss various important issues confronting the nation and the people and approved the Demands for Grants of the total amount of nearly Rs. 5 lakh crores without any debate or discussion. My humble efforts have proved to be inadequate and it is my great sorrow that all the attempts of the Chair to see that the House functions normally and the

important business before the House is transacted after due debate and participation by the hon. Members have not had the desired result.

I have no doubt that the hon. Members from all sides of the House want transaction of the normal business but as you are aware, on many days even the Question Hour could not be gone through, let alone other important business.

It is not my intention here to fix the responsibility on any one with regard to the happenings in the House. But I am requesting hon. Members to please ponder whether our democratic set up has been strengthened or weakened by the way some Members have conducted themselves inside the House.

One of the leading Parliamentarians of our time, who had been our Prime Minister, namely, Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee, has repeatedly expressed in this House his anguish, when during his Prime Ministership, the proceedings in the House could not be carried out in a proper manner. He expressed repeatedly his view that the Question Hour should not ever be disturbed and whatever issues were there, they should be allowed to be raised later on with the consent of the Speaker.

On one occasion, he observed that the Members of the Opposition and those from the Ruling Party, if required, should have full opportunity to express their views. However, the Members should express their views within the parameters of the Rules and dignity of the House. He asked, whether it was necessary to seek suspension of the 'Question Hour' time and again and to interrupt the proceedings during the 'Question Hour', and if it was not suspended, to rush to the well of the House and to see that ultimately the House was adjourned.

Even at the risk of being considered to be sermonising, I feel it is my duty to express my sincere feelings of concern for the future of democracy in this country. A few days back, a number of young students from different schools came to Parliament and were sitting in the Visitors' Gallery. They were allowed to stay for one hour, as usual, out of which there was adjournment for 45 minutes

and for the remaining 15 minutes no business could be transacted because of the happenings on the floor of the House. What impression of our conduct did they carry back home? I have been, with folded hands, appealing to all the hon. Members to cooperate with the Chair, and I have been repeatedly indicating and trying to follow my commitment that all important issues, within the rules, will be allowed to be raised and I have tried to keep the assurance that I had given.

It is destructive of the basic tenets of Parliamentary functioning, when deliberately disrespect is shown to the Chair. Some Members seek to behave as Super-Speakers. Who will speak, when he will speak, what subject will be

discussed and how the business will be conducted, now seem to be decided on the floor and the Chair seems to have no role to play. Another recent but most disturbing development is that decision is taken by some hon. Members outside the Chamber whether the House will transact its normal business or not, and the Speaker is only informed of the same and he is expected to accept the decision and act accordingly.

I have stated many times in the House that this is not only my House, it belongs to every hon. Member and more particularly it is the House of the People of India, who have, in exercise of their important and precious right of franchise, elected us as their representatives and sent us here. But to what purpose? Obviously, with a view to deal with the problems confronting the nation, to deal with their reasonable demands and expectations and to see that the Ruling Party implements its promises made in their manifesto, and that Opposition remains ever vigilant to enforce the accountability of the Government as our Constitution enjoins. But the discharge of the duties and responsibilities of the Members now seems to depend on the wishes of a few of them. I have been receiving letters, telephone calls, etc., in which critical remarks have been made about the functioning of the House. There have been adverse comments in the Media also about the non-functioning of the House.

It is said sometimes by way of supposed justification that in previous Houses also similar unfortunate and undesirable activities had taken place. That may have been, but nobody approved of the same. Therefore, should we not try to abjure undesirable methods which may have been adopted in the past and conduct ourselves with full dignity and decorum to maintain the prestige of this great institution and to enhance the same which will secure the approbation of the people of the country, who are our real masters? I wonder what would have been the position if our Constitution and the laws provided for recall of the Members by the electorate.

My esteemed colleagues and hon. Members, I earnestly appeal to you - I address this to my friends in Opposition also - with all humility and sincerity, and with all seriousness at my command to please see that we conduct ourselves in a manner that the people to whom this House really belongs can have faith and can have respect for us. My appeal is to the conscience of all the hon. Members.

Our founding fathers have chosen parliamentary democracy as the system of our polity in which the Lok Sabha occupies the central and the most vital position. To strengthen parliamentary democracy, it is necessary that the people should have faith in the system. Otherwise, it will degenerate into dictatorship, which will, to say the least, be nothing but disaster. We should not conduct in a manner, which will shake the people's confidence in the system itself.

Let us resolve that we shall perform the task assigned to us to the best of our ability and with sincerity. As I have humbly submitted earlier, we should ask ourselves when the House rises for the day every evening as to what we have done during the day for the country and for the people and whether we have justified the people's faith in sending us here. Nothing will give us more satisfaction than the feeling that we have tried our best.

I urge upon the Leaders of all parties to ponder over this matter during the inter-session period and find a solution to this problem so that the Chair may not be forced to take recourse to harsh measures in future, which it will be keen to avoid. I am worried that an occasion may come which will make it impossible for the Speaker to remain a hapless occupant of the Chair.

In the end, I express my thanks, for the cooperation received, to all the hon. Members and my colleagues, the hon. Deputy-Speaker, the members of the Panel of Chairmen, as also to the Leader of the House, hon. Prime Minister, the Leader of Opposition, the Leaders of various parties and groups as well as the Chief Whips.

I would also like to thank, on behalf of all of you, the Press and the Media who extended their cooperation. I also thank the officers and staff of the Lok Sabha Secretariat, CPWD and other allied agencies for their assistance.

THE PRIME MINISTER (DR. MANMOHAN SINGH): Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I rise today to make my concluding observations on this final day of the Lok Sabha's current Session, I do so with a great deal of sadness. This Session had to be concluded prematurely and we are indeed living through abnormal times. This Lok Sabha has witnessed that we could not find time to debate vital issues mentioned in the President's Address. That was not enough and now we have seen that the vital financial business of our country could also be passed without any serious discussion, debate and dialogue. As you have said, this does not augur well for the future of democracy or, for that matter, for the parliamentary system as a whole.

Politics in our country has to play the role of a mediator between various societal tensions which are built into body

politic of a poor country trying to modernise and trying to develop, and this requires a great deal of patience, a great deal of tact and a great deal of understanding of the point of view of those who will not always agree with us. Parliament is a forum where these facilities are provided. We are living however in times when Parliament is not allowed to discharge its vital responsibilities. I do not wish to apportion blame but I say it in all humility that we in this Government have tried our very best to seek the cooperation of all sections of the House that regardless of our differences, we should allow the conduct of the House to proceed in a normal manner. This has not materialised. It has not been for want of trying. You yourself have provided magnificent lead giving us sage advise at every stage. Your wisdom, knowledge and experience are today our greatest asset. You and the hon. Deputy Speaker and the learned Secretary-General and the staff of the Lok Sabha had worked hard but in terms of the end result, I think, I would be less than candid if I were not to say that I feel sad at the end of the day.

We have to reflect about the consequences of what has been happening in Parliament in recent weeks. This is not the way in which a great democracy of ours ought to function. Our people have sent us to Parliament to ensure that all the monies that are voted, all the monies that are sought to be spent, are spent wisely to meet the felt needs of our people. Our people have sent us to Parliament to ensure that the tax proposals of the Financial Statement or the Budget are in accord with the people's priorities and people's preferences. We may have different views about preferences and priorities but Parliament provides us a valuable mechanism to reconcile these divergences and differences and the situation in which Parliament is not allowed to discharge this vital essential task is something about which we must all be worried about.

On our part, I can assure you of our fullest cooperation. We as a Government recognise that the Opposition in a parliamentary democracy has a vital role to play. We recognise the right of the Opposition to dissent. We recognise that the Opposition has a very valuable role to ensure that our system moves along the desired path.

But, if the House is to run in an orderly fashion, the Opposition has also some responsibility. And, I sincerely hope that after the conclusion of this Session and when the House re-convenes, all of us have the wisdom to reflect on what is wrong with our methods of working. And I sincerely hope that when the House re-convenes, we would have set in motion processes which will ensure that what has happened in recent weeks was truly a thing of the past.

With these words, I once again thank you for the guidance that we have received from you, the hon. Deputy-Speaker, the hon. Secretary-General and the staff of the Lok Sabha Secretariat. And, as I said, all of you have worked hard, valiantly to steer the course of this House and for that, all of you, Sir, deserve our warmest and sincerest thanks.

MR. SPEAKER: Hon. Members may now stand up as *Vande Mataram* will be played.

17.51 hrs. NATIONAL SONG

(The National Song was played.)

MR. SPEAKER: The House stands adjourned *sine die*.

17.52 hrs.

The Lok Sabha then adjourned sine die.
