

THE PRIME MINISTER (DR. MANMOHAN SINGH): Madam Speaker, I rise to join all Members of this august House in conveying our sincere thanks to the hon. President for her enlightened Address. The debate on the President's Address has been very wide-ranging and Shri Jaswant Singhji has made his contribution as well. I thank all the hon. Members from all sides who have contributed to this debate.

The President's Address lays down the objectives and the roadmap that our Government is following and will pursue with greater vigour to deal with the challenges that are mentioned in the President's Address. The President's Address in paragraph 10 refers to five important challenges that our country faces today. They are :-

- 1) to strive for livelihood security for the vast majority of our population and contribute to work for removal of poverty, hunger and illiteracy from our land;
- 2) to achieve economic security through rapid and broad-based development and creation of productive jobs for our people;
- 3) to ensure energy security for our rapid growth;
- 4) to realise our developmental goals without jeopardizing our ecological and environmental security; and
- 5) to guarantee our internal and external security within the framework of just, plural, secular and inclusive growth.

Madam, these five challenges sum up the task that lies ahead of our Government in the two-and-a-half years that remain.

As far as the economy is concerned, my colleague, the hon. Minister of Finance has placed *the Economic Survey* on the Table of the House and the *Economic Survey* gives an exhaustive account of the state of the economy. The Finance Minister has also referred to challenges facing us, in his Budget Speech. Madam, all these issues will be thoroughly debated during the general debate on the Budget next week. Therefore, I will be brief while dealing with the economy of the country.

I am sure, hon. Members are aware that we are charting our course through waters that are choppy for all countries today. The year 2011-12 has been a difficult year for all countries. Global growth decelerated everywhere. Industrialised countries grew at the rate of only 1.6 per cent in 2011, which is half the rate in the previous years. The international economic environment that we face is highly uncertain.

The developments in North Africa and West Asia have led to a steep increase in the prices of hydrocarbons adversely affecting among others prices of fertilisers and food grains that have also put pressure on our balance of payment.

Madam, in this background, our own economic performance of about seven per cent growth -- though slower than what we had hoped -- must be regarded as commendable. Of course, we cannot view this as acceptable. We must strive to improve upon this in the next year and return as quickly as possible to a higher growth path and we must do this while also ensuring that we will progress towards our objective of achieving inclusive growth with reasonable price stability. Madam, for all this, we need a broad-based national consensus covering all sections of political opinion represented in this august House. This is an occasion when we must rise above narrow partisan ends and stand united as a nation.

Madam, we grew at 9 per cent for five years before 2008, and I do believe that we can get back to that kind of growth rate provided we can agree on a number of difficult decisions. If we succeed in that objective, we will ensure that India continues its rise as an economic power and acquires the economic capability of reducing persistent poverty from which we have suffered and fills the gaps, which are all too evident in critical areas such as health, education, skill-development, and provision of clean drinking water and sanitation. Shri Jaswant Singh referred to the problem of drinking water supply. I assure him that our Government attaches high priority to ensuring that all our citizens have access to clean drinking water. ... (*Interruptions*)

MADAM SPEAKER: Nothing will go on record.

*(Interruptions) ... **

DR. MANMOHAN SINGH : Madam, several Members have referred to the problems faced by weaker sections of our society and I do agree with them that we need to focus, in particular, on the developmental gaps affecting the weaker sections of our population such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, the Other Backward Classes, the Minorities and other disadvantaged groups. I would like to assure the hon. Members that we will rise to this important task. ... *(Interruptions)*

Madam, the Twelfth Five-Year Plan, which will be presented to the National Development Council (NDC) sometime in the middle of the year, will lay out a credible plan of action for faster, sustainable and more inclusive growth. I do not wish to go into details, but only wish to remind the hon. Members that our path is not easy.

I am sure that the hon. Members also realize that the difficult decisions that we have to take are made more difficult by the fact that we are a coalition Government and we have to evolve policy keeping in mind the need to maintain a consensus. The challenges that this poses have been sharply brought out in the developments following the presentation of the Railway Budget. I would like to use this opportunity to inform the hon. Members of the latest development. Madam, I received late last night an e-mail message followed by a formal letter from Shri Dinesh Trivedi tendering his resignation as the Railway Minister.

I propose to forward this letter to the President with the recommendation to accept Shri Trivedi's letter of resignation. I regret the departure of Shri Trivedi. He had presented the Railway Budget which promised to carry out the Vision 2020 that was outlined by his predecessor. A new Railway Minister will be sworn in shortly. He will have the onerous duty of carrying forward the challenging task of modernizing our railway system.

Madam Speaker, in a country as large and as complex as ours, and where the farmers of our country constitute 65 per cent of the labour force, it is inevitable

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that Parliament and the Government should be worried about the state of India's agriculture. I share the agony of the hon. Members, when they refer to the suicides of our farmers.

The House has my assurance that we will work with renewed vigour to ensure that no farmer in our country is forced to go to the extreme level of committing suicide.

Our Government has attached high priority to the development of agriculture, to increase public investment in agriculture, to ensure that there is more attention, technologically, paid to the development of agriculture and as a result, the growth rate of agricultural production within the last five years has been as high as three per cent to 3.5 per cent per annum. This year we are likely to achieve a record production of food grains of 250 million tonnes.

Last year, Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana, the National Horticulture Mission, and the Food Security Mission have all contributed to create a more favourable environment for the growth of agriculture. But I will be the last one to say that more cannot be done. We will, in the Twelfth Five-Year Plan, focus more sharply on the development of our agriculture because the interest of farmers is uppermost in the minds of our Government. That will be the priority we will follow with due diligence.

Madam, there were references to the price situation in the country. I do admit that in the last two years, the prices have become a problem. Fortunately, there are indications that prices are coming under control, but we have to be vigilant. It was in this context that the Finance Minister's effort to control the fiscal deficit is very relevant. Our fiscal deficit did increase in the year 2008-09 because of the developments in the international economic environment, and it was our hope that we will be able to get back to a more reasonable level of fiscal deficit in the year 2011-12. The Finance Minister had projected a fiscal deficit of 4.8 per cent for that year. It turns out that the fiscal deficit will be as high as 5.9 per cent. The Finance Minister has committed our Government to work towards a reduction in the fiscal deficit to 5.1 per cent in the next year. It is very important that the Finance Minister succeeds in the control of fiscal deficit, in the control over the

balance of payments deficit to a more reasonable level as it is essential for us to achieve our objectives of growth with reasonable price stability.

Since these matters will be debated at length during the debate on the Budget, I do not propose to spend more time in dealing with these issues. However, there are certain matters which I would like to refer to and one of these relates to the establishment of the National Counter Terrorism Centre. While discussing issue relating to the National Counter Terrorism Centre, Shri Rajnath Singh Ji questioned the sincerity of our Government while dealing with problems of terrorism.

Madam, dealing with terrorism and dealing effectively as well to control left wing extremism constitute two big challenges before our country and for all the growth objectives that we have, particularly, the development of the Central Indian regions. The States of Chattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand are infested with left wing extremism. Control over left wing extremism and control over terrorism are absolute necessities if we are to achieve our growth objectives.

Madam, let me assure the House that our Government is committed to providing fully secured living conditions to its citizens and it will take every possible step to deal with the menace of terrorism. In fact, setting up the NCTC is an important step in that direction. Concern has been raised that the Central Government is trying to encroach upon the jurisdiction of the State Government and it has been suggested that they should be taken into confidence before the National Counter Terrorism Centre becomes operational. The question of setting up of National Counter Terrorism Centre has been discussed at various fora since the report of the Group of Ministers appointed by the previous Government and the recommendations of the Second Administrative Reforms Commission were submitted. The multi-agency Centre that was established in 2001 was a pre-cursor to the NCTC and the need for a single and effective point of consideration for coordination for counter terrorism has been discussed in meetings on internal security of Chief Ministers. As has been pointed out by some Members that a number of Chief Ministers have expressed their concern after the order was issued and I have replied to them that there will be consultations before the next steps are

taken. The consultation was held on 12th March, 2012 with the Chief Secretaries and DGPs from different State Governments. The meeting of the Chief Ministers on Internal Security has been called which was originally scheduled for 15th February, 2012 but because of elections, it had to be postponed. It is now scheduled on 16th April, 2012. Therefore, adequate and full consultations will take place before the next steps are taken.

Madam, I think that the idea of NCTC and the manner in which the NCTC will function are two separate issues. The idea of NCTC, you have all agreed is unexceptional. And the manner in which the NCTC will function, there may be differences but I am confident that through discussions and dialogues, these differences could be narrowed down and a consensus can be arrived and that will be our sincere effort.

Madam, another issue which was raised during the debate relates to the state of Sri Lankan Tamils. Some Members have raised concern regarding the situation in Sri Lanka. The Central Government fully shares the concerns and sentiments raised by hon. Members regarding the welfare of Sri Lankan Tamils. Since the end of conflict in Sri Lanka, our focus has been on the welfare and well being of the Tamil citizens of Sri Lanka. Their resettlement and rehabilitation has been of the highest and most immediate priority for our Government. The steps taken by the Central Government in this regard has been outlined in the *suo motu* statement made by the External Affairs Minister on 14th March, 2012. As a result of our constructive engagement with the Government of Sri Lanka and our considerable assistance programme, a modicum of normalcy is beginning to return to the Tamil areas in Sri Lanka. There has also been progress, given the withdrawal of emergency regulations by the Government of Sri Lanka and the conduct of elections to local bodies in the Northern provinces of Sri Lanka.

Members have also raised the issue of human rights violations during the protracted conflict in Sri Lanka and on the US initiated draft resolution on promoting reconciliation and accountability in Sri Lanka at the on-going 19th Session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva. The Government of India has emphasised to the Government of Sri Lanka the importance of a genuine

process of reconciliation to address the grievances of the Tamil community. In this connection, we have called for implementation of the recommendations contained in the report of the Commission appointed by the Sri Lankan Government that has been tabled before the Sri Lankan Parliament. These include various constructive measures for healing the wounds of the conflict and fostering the process of lasting peace and reconciliation in Sri Lanka.

We have asked the Government of Sri Lanka to stand by its commitment towards pursuit of a political process through a broader dialogue with all parties including the Tamil National Alliance leading to the full implementation of the 13th Amendment to the Sri Lankan Constitution so as to achieve meaningful devolution of power and genuine national reconciliation. We hope that the Government of Sri Lanka recognises the critical importance of this issue, acts decisively and with vision in this regard. We will remain engaged with them through this process and encourage them to take forward the dialogue with the elected representatives of Sri Lankan Tamils.

As regards the issue of a draft resolution initiated by the United States at the on-going 19th Session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, we do not yet have the final text of the Resolution. However, I may assure the House that we are inclined to vote in favour of a Resolution. That, we hope, will advance our objective, namely, the achievement of the future for the Tamil community in Sri Lanka that is marked by equality, dignity, justice and self-respect.

DR. M. THAMBIDURAI (KARUR): Are you going to support the Resolution? ...
(Interruptions)

MADAM SPEAKER: Let us continue. Nothing will go on record.

(Interruptions) ... *

MADAM SPEAKER: Nothing will go on record.

(Interruptions) ... *

* Not recorded

DR. MANMOHAN SINGH: Madam, Shri Jaswant Singhji has raised the issue of Gorkhaland Territorial Administration. I wish to assure this House that we have worked with sincerity to find an amicable solution to this difficult problem. We recognise the contribution made by the Government of West Bengal in facilitating this outcome. Whatever issues are outstanding, the House has my assurance, we will work with the same constructive spirit to find a pragmatic, practical and viable solution.

Madam, I would not like to take more of the time of this House. I once again join all Members in thanking hon. President for her enlightened address which I hope we can adopt with acclamation.