

our opposition to this text. At the same time, I would like to point out that unlike the Conference on Disarmament which takes decision by consensus, the UN General Assembly has its own rules of procedure. Nevertheless, we have a position of principle which will be made known in this forum too.

Madam, many countries with whom we have close bilateral relations have adopted a position on this issue which is different from our stands. We have, through our dialogue, tried to explain the rationale for our position. We believe that agreement on all issues is not a pre-requisite for close bilateral relations but mutual respect for each other's vital national concerns is. We are committed to strengthening our relations with all countries and remain confident that our differences on this issue will not affect our bilateral ties.

16.48½ hrs.

GENERAL BUDGET 1996-97 GENERAL
DISCUSSION - CONTD.

[English]

MR. CHAIRMAN : Now, we shall resume the discussion on the General Budget.

Shri Virendra Kumar Singh

[Translation]

SHRI VIRENDRA KUMAR SINGH : Madam Chairman, at the outset I would like to express my gratitude to the hon. Finance Minister Shri Chidambaram for presenting poor-oriented, farmers-oriented, labour oriented, equality oriented Budget ... (Interruptions) I know there will be interruption. When new Members stand to speak, the interruption takes place. But when hon. Joshiji was speaking, I don't think there was any interruption but I think there will be interruptions... (Interruptions)

SHRI ATAL BIHARI VAJPAYEE : (Lucknow) : There will be no interruption.

MR. CHAIRMAN : Let the new Member speak, please donot interrupt.

SHRI VIRENDRA KUMAR SINGH : This Budget is poor oriented because the provision of Rs. 1263 crores in the budget for poverty eradication has been increased to Rs. 2195 crores. Similarly, there was a provision of Rs. 8000 crores in the earlier budget for rural employment which has now been increased to Rs 10,500 crores. The opposition parties have termed it as anti-farmers and anti - labourers budget. This is wrong

criticism. If you criticise, let it be so. It is your duty to criticize

16.58 hrs.

(Mr. Speaker in the Chair)

It is said that all the amount in the budget is spent in repaying loan and no means of new income has been given. I would like to know why have you not given any suggestion. You talk of elimination of unemployment, corruption, price rise, illiteracy but the opposition has not given any concrete programme in this respect. They simply criticize. Of course this should be there but they should give some programme also so that people do not think it is a anti-farmers budget.

When we have given Subsidy to all people to buy 30 thousand tractors, it became anti-farmers. When we have increased the allocation for rural employment to the labour them it became anti-labourers. We have alloted an additional sum of Rs. 2500 to develop rural infrastructure. For infrastructure industries, life insurance has been strengthened.

17.00 hrs.

One more thing has been said about the budget that it is a copy of the budget presented by Dr. Manmohan Singh. But it is not so because, Dr. Manmohan Singh's budget was based on low income rate for generating more revenue whereas Shri P. Chidambaram did not find it proper to do away with corporate surcharge. In addition to it he has proposed 12 percent alternative tax on corporate sector. Inflation will be controlled upto 6-7 percent.

[English]

MR. SPEAKER : You can resume a little later. Now, it is five O'clock.

STATEMENT BY PRIME MINISTER

Amarnath Yatra

[English]

THE PRIME MINISTER (SHRI H.D. DEVE GOWDA): Sir, with you kind permission, I would like to make the following Statement as the hon. Home Minister has still not reached Delhi from Jammu. As you have directed, I am making the Statement. Apart from this, any further details will be available to the House after the hon. Home Minister comes back. I think, tomorrow. It may not be possible today.

Sir, the Amarnath Yatra this year has been struck by tragedy because of unprecedented bad weather, heavy rain, snow, landslides and flooding. According to

available information, 121 persons have lost their lives, mostly due to heart and pulmonary failure, and exposure. Relief operations have been severely hampered due to continuing inclement weather, which has disrupted all forms of communications, and also prevented airborne rescue and relief operations.

2. The Yatra commenced this year on 16 August and was to be completed by 3 September, after the main Darshan scheduled on 28 August. Elaborate Planning was done and arrangements made for the Yatra in anticipation of participation of around one lakh yatris as compared to around 70,800 in 1995, 40,000 in 1994.

3. The following main arrangements had been made for the Yatra this year.

- (i) 1200 tents each were pitched at the staging camps at Chandanwari, Sheshnag and Panjtarni, i.e., a total of 3600 tents, as against a total of 900 and 750 tents in all these locations during 1995 and 1994 respectively. In 1995, it is only 900 tents and in 1994, it is only 750, but this year we have made 3600 tents in these three areas. The original plan was to set up around 1900 tents, which was increased to provide greater comfort to the yatris, and, as a contingency, in case of a larger than anticipated number of pilgrims coming for the Yatra. In addition three concrete sheds each were constructed at Sheshnag and Panjtarni. Provision was made through these arrangements for accommodating around 18,000-20,000 pilgrims each at Sheshnag and Panjtarni respectively.
- (ii) 25 metric tonnes of rice and atta, 7 tonnes of sugar and 8 tonnes of wheat bran were stocked at Sheshnag and Panjtarni. This was in addition to arrangements made by the J and K Tourism Development Corporation at Chandanwari, Sheshnag and Panjtarni, and 39 free "langars" set up at the staging camps between Pahalgam and the Holy Cave for providing food and meals to the pilgrims. Further, a large number of local private shopkeepers had set up shops selling eatables, tea, biscuits, etc., all along the Yatra route.
- (iii) The Government hospital at Pahalgam was made fully operational as a base hospital, and sufficient quantities of medicines were stocked there. Arrangements were also made by the State Government for provision of medical aid at Chandanwari, Zojibal, Mahagumas Top, Panchtarni and the Holy Cave. Large quantities of medicines and Oxygen cylinders were

provided and doctors and para medical staff deputed at these places. In addition, the Army and the BSF have also set up medical aid camps at Chandanwari, Sheshnag and Panchtarni.

- (iv) 14,500 blankets were arranged for the pilgrims, to supplement the beddings, etc., carried by the pilgrims.
- (v) Firewood was stocked in adequate quantities at different points on the Yatra route. In addition over a thousand L.P.G. Cylinders were stored at various points for the requirements of the "langars" that had been set up.
- (vi) Ponies and porters were arranged on a large scale for the pilgrimage.

The Yatra route from Pahalgam to the Holy Cave traverses a distance of over 45 kms. involving a steep climb over rugged mountains, mostly at a height of over 12,000 feet. At these heights, problems arising, from lack of oxygen arise commonly, which can be serious, particularly for the aged and infirm.

Keeping all these factors in view, 'Do's and Don'ts' and basic information of the requirements for the Yatris were printed and published well in advance for the guidance of the pilgrims. With your permission, Sir, I beg to lay on the Table a copy of the information pamphlets. These copies were also widely publicised through the newspapers, etc. The points stressed in these *inter alia* included :

- (i) The Yatris should carry with them items like blankets/sleeping bags, heavy woollens, wind cheaters/raincoats, water proof shoes, etc. In fact, it was stated that Yatris not carrying the above items would not be registered for the Yatra. Arrangements were made to see that shops selling these items in Jammu, where the registration for the Yatra was done, remain open till late hours in the night for the convenience of the pilgrims.
- (ii) Every pilgrim was asked to get himself/herself medically examined to ensure that he/she is physically fit to undertake the journey.
- (iii) The Yatris were advised to carry with them eatables like biscuits, sweets, milk powder, tinned food, etc., and a personal medicine kit, and that it would also be advisable for them to get themselves inoculated.

The Yatra commenced as per schedule on 16 August and around 25,000 pilgrims left Jammu for Pahalgam on 16 August. By 21 August around 1.2 lakh pilgrims had left Jammu for Amarnath and till then the

Yatra had been proceeding smoothly, although 11 persons had lost lives due to cardiac arrest/pulmonary failure.

On the night of 21-22 August, the weather took a sudden turn and heavy rainfall began, along with snow and sleet in the higher reaches of the Yatra route, i.e., the Holy Cave, Panjtarni, Mahagunas and Sheshnag. The unprecedented rains and snow, accompanied by chilly winds continued unabated till 24 August and temperatures in the higher reaches dropped sharply. As a result of the extremely heavy rains, there were landslides and flooding at a number of places in the State, and the National Highway and the road between Jammu-Srinagar and Srinagar-Pahalgam was blocked at a number of places. All this also led to the Yatris getting stranded at a number of places between Pahalgam and the Holy Cave and at different places on the route between Jammu and Pahalgam. At the same time, airborne operations for relief and evacuation of pilgrims in distress on the track between Pahalgam and the Holy Cave were rendered impossible because of continuous rain, even though helicopters had been kept ready and on stand-by for launching relief and rescue operations.

On 23 August, about 52,000 pilgrims were stranded in the upper reaches at Panjtarni (27,000), Sheshnag (11,000), and Chandanwari (14,500). In spite of rain and snow, on 24th the Army and Security force units and the Police deployed along the route, made all out efforts to bring the pilgrims stranded in the higher reaches to the lower areas. As soon as there was a break in the rain after the 24th evening, helicopters were also pressed into service, and most of the pilgrims have been moved to Pahalgam.

According to the latest information available, the number of pilgrims in higher reaches is as follows: At Panjtarni, it is about 150, at Sheshnag, it is 100 and at Chandanwari, it is about 8,000. Around 2000 pilgrims have also been brought to a place called Baltal, on an alternate route to Srinagar from Amarnath and efforts are on to bring them to Srinagar, where camps have been set up for lodging them.

Additional food and medicine supplies have also been sent to Pahalgam, and supplies are also in the process of being airlifted to Sheshnag and Chandanwari. Fifty persons who required urgent medical attention were evacuated by helicopter to Srinagar on 25th August. Of those who have died, the bodies of 40 pilgrims have been brought to Baltal and efforts to retrieve the remaining bodies are going on.

Lieutenant General Saklani, Advisor for Home and Tourism, Government of Jammu and Kashmir is the overall in charge of the Amarnath Yatra and he has been closely supervising the initial arrangements for

the Yatra, as well as the relief measures. He has made a number of trips to all the places along the route and as soon as the weather permitted, rushed to Pahalgam and Panjtarni with medical supplies, blankets etc. The Home Ministry got in touch with the Defence Ministry on 23rd and requested all possible assistance to handle the relief. As a result, the Defence Ministry immediately swung into action. The Union Home Secretary was present in the office throughout Saturday the 24th and Sunday the 25th and instructed the State Government to send the situation reports every three hours. A Special Information Centre was also opened at the Police Control Room, Srinagar to facilitate the families and relations to get information about the pilgrims.

About 73 of the dead bodies have been identified and the list has been released to the Press. Since the highway between Anantnag and Jammu is blocked and could take two to three days to be cleared, the possibilities of airlifting the bodies from Srinagar are being explored.

The Border Roads Organisation in round the clock efforts to clear the road blocks and landslides so that the downward movement of the stranded pilgrims to Jammu can begin. However, problems are also being encountered because of flooding and submergence of the road between Pahalgam and Khanabal, and between Khanabal and Srinagar on the National Highway which has also created bottlenecks in the road movement.

The Ministry of Railways have organised seven special trains from Jammu to clear the pilgrim traffic without any delay.

Keeping in view the extreme inclement weather conditions the State Government stopped movement of any yatris forward towards the cave. The 'Charri Mubarak' which was also stranded at Udampur due to road blocks on the National Highway was airlifted on 25th of August to Srinagar and will be taken with a group of Sadhus to Panjtarni on 27th August for its final traditional journey to the Holy Cave on 28th August. The same day it would return to Panjtarni and be flown back to Srinagar.

As in the last two or three years right from the beginning there had been apprehensions of possible threats to the yatris from the militants and there were reports of likely attempts to plant explosive devices etc., at the traditional camp sites. Keeping in view these apprehensions and possibilities the sites of the camps at Chandanwari and Sheshnag were also relocated soon before the commencement of the yatra to ensure the security of the pilgrims. As a result of the security precautions and tight arrangements, the yatra has so far passed off peacefully and without any disruption on this score.

It would be seen from the foregoing that there has been a record participation in the pilgrimage this year. The State Administration and the Security Forces had been fully geared up to ensure the safe and smooth conduct of the yatra and the arrangements for the accommodation, food, medical supplies etc., had been substantially augmented as compared to the previous years. Also, this time, all these arrangements were further strengthened by the whole-hearted cooperation of the local employees and participation by all sections of the local population who provide various services for the yatra which was a particularly heartening feature of this year's yatra. The yatra was proceeding smoothly till 21st August when tragedy struck in the form of sudden and unprecedented rains and snow.

The magnitude and unprecedented nature of this would be seen from the fact that the casualties include at least four security force personnel and eight porters and ponywallahs who are generally acclimatised to the heights and the local conditions and are physically very fit.

Efforts have been mounted and are continuing on a war footing by the State Administration, the Army and the security forces to provide relief and succour to the pilgrims who are stranded in various places, and to ensure that the road blocks are also cleared at the earliest so that the pilgrims can move to their houses. *Ex gratia* relief of Rs. 50,000/- has been sanctioned from the Prime Minister's Relief Fund to the families of those who have lost their lives in the calamity and an equal amount of *ex gratia* relief has been announced by the State Government.

The latest position is about the railway facilities that have been provided. At about four o'clock I got this information. There are only about 15 to 20 yatrics left in the Railway Station. All those pilgrims who came to the Railway station have been helped to go to Delhi as a first step. And then subsequently they will go to their own places.

This is the latest position and I have made the statement on the facts available now. After the Home Minister comes back, if any further information is there it will be supplied to the hon. House.

So far as the discussion is concerned, the Government has no hesitation. Whatever decision that has been taken in the all-party meeting, we are ready for discussion. Any other information about the facilities to be provided on the advice of the senior Members of the House, the Government is prepared to consider. I am prepared to have a discussion today or tomorrow as per the decision that is going to be taken.

DO'S AND DON'TS FOR YATRIES TO SHRI AMARNATH JI

Do's

1. Please ensure that you are fit to perform the journey. Do have yourself medically examined. Remember that you have to cross Mahagunas top which is about 14,000 feet high.
2. Do carry your own tents, Sleeping Bags, Blankets, Beddings, heavy woollens, wind sheeters, rain coats, water-proof shoes, torches and walking sticks.
3. Kindly carry some eatables like biscuits, sweets, milk powder and tinned food with you.
4. Avail Ration and Fire wood quota especially arranged for you at all stages.
5. Kindly ensure that all your arrangements are in perfect order. Examine the tent (s) that you have hired. Make sure that the ponywalla, the labourer, the dandywalla is properly registered and carries a token.
6. Please ensure that ponies carrying your luggage and eatables etc. remain with you all the time. If you let them remain behind, you are likely to be inconvenienced.
7. Kindly observe discipline on the trek and keep on moving slowly and steadily. Adhere to the instructions issued by the Yatra Officer from time to time. The officials of the Police, Tourism, Health, Food and other Departments are there to help you perform the journey comfortably.

Don'ts

1. Do not overstrain on steep gradients.
2. Do not stop at any point where there are warning notices.
3. Do not break traffic discipline or try to overtake others in difficult stretches.
4. Do not pay more than the prices fixed for porters, ponies, dandies, rations, firewood and for supplies from Dhabas.
5. All medical attendance is free of cost.

Note : Aged, Infirm, ailing and yatrics not sufficiently clothed will not be permitted to proceed beyond Pahalgam.

[Translation]

SHRIMATI SUSHMA SWARAJ (South Delhi) : Mr. Speaker, Sir, if the statement of the Prime Minister is

taken as true then whatever the hon. Members have said was untrue. Were all those allegations baseless? Was all the anguish expressed a farce. Here every Member is saying that people of his constituency are contacting him/her to seek information. We are further trying to contact officers but they are not available. We are not in a position to tell the people anything. While giving speech, the hon. Prime Minister said that not only the arrangements for the yatra were adequate but it were better and everything was handled properly. When it is the reply of the whole discussion then what is the use of speaking on this subject. It means that whatever we Members have said here irrespective of the party affiliations and placed our experience as well on that of individual constituencies here and the reply of the Prime Minister indicates that what he said was true than what is the use of having a discussion on it?

I would like to ask the hon. Prime Minister whether he has taken notice of all what the hon. Members have said in the morning? Whatever the officers have written, he simply read it out as it is...*(Interruptions)* What is the use of that discussion? Were all those facts untrue? ...*(Interruptions)* This is even not a cover-up ...*(Interruptions)*

SHRIMATI JAYAWANTI NAVINCHANDRA MEHTA (Bombay South): Sir, the Prime Minister has not spoken for Mumbai. About 200 yatis from Bombay and stranded in the Amarnath Yatra...*(Interruptions)*

SHRIMATI SUSHMA SWARAJ : Shri Jawant Singh and others are saying...*(Interruptions)* If the statement of the Prime Minister is true then there is no need of further discussion on it. Everything is O.K. Whatever was good before, is also good now. There is no need of any supervision and rescue work...*(Interruptions)* People are crying. The people are stranded there ...*(Interruptions)*

[English]

SHRI SOMNATH CHATTERJEE (Bolgpur) : It has been agreed to have a discussion. This is a direct challenge to the veracity of the statement. In the discussion that can be done. This is a very serious charge. Let us not convert this House into a slanging match.

[Translation]

SHRIMATI SUSHMA SWARAJ : There the food, sugar, wheat were all in adequate measure ...*(Interruptions)*. The medicines were sufficient. Every care was without fault...*(Interruptions)*.

[English]

This is not the official statement.

SHRI ATAL BIHARI VAJPAYEE (Lucknow) : He has

given statement on the basis of reports that have been received. The Home Minister has not returned yet. The Hon. Minister has seen the situation. We would like to hear his conclusions. After hearing the statement of the Prime Minister, a question comes to the mind repeatedly that if the arrangements were so good then all these deaths were due to the natural calamity? Did not the administration take necessary steps at that time? Why there was delay in calling the army? The Governor was here in Delhi for the last three days. You have not mentioned about it. The Chief Secretary was also in Delhi. But no one could be contacted in Delhi. No control room was set up in Jammu and Srinagar. These are all failures. Are we in a position to deal with sudden tragedy or the arrangements made in advance can be considered adequate? The nature has challenged them and if the administration could not stand up to face that challenge then it should be a matter of concern for the hon. Prime Minister...*(Interruptions)* But the speech of the Prime Minister does not show any concern. So I would like that we should wait for the statement of the Home Minister. The House is ready for a discussion. After all we have to initiate the discussion. But if one thinks that it is a cover up and if after this serious tragedy it is proved that the Government had made all the arrangements but the weather did not favour them, I think it would be injustice with the situation. It even such a situation arose the people should not have been allowed to die. We should have saved them and if there has been any lapse it should be looked into.

Whatever was said in the morning is not an issue of a party. We should find out the truth but the speech of the Prime Minister does not throw any light on it. He has not replied to a number of issues which put the Government in the dock. I would like that the Prime Minister go into this matter in depth. When the hon'ble Home Minister comes tomorrow, we will hear him and then decides in what form the discussion should take place.

[English]

MR. SPEAKER : I think, we can wait for the report of the Home Minister.

SHRI H.D. DEVE GOWDA : Sir, I was not prepared to make the statement today. I had requested you about it.

MR. SPEAKER : Yes, exactly.

SHRI H.D. DEVE GOWDA : I requested that the statement will be made by the Home Minister when he comes back.

In the morning during the meeting of Leaders of all the Parties in your Chamber, they took a decision about

it. I do not know. That is the information given by Parliamentary Affairs Minister that the matter should be taken up for discussion after the Home Minister comes and makes a statement. This is what was conveyed to me by my parliamentary Affairs Minister. I have not come here to make a *suo motu* statement. I have never said that the hon. Leader of the Opposition is mixing politics in this very sad tragedy. I have never said it. I have placed on the floor of the House only whatever information that I have.

MR. SPEAKER : It is correct.

(Interruptions)

SHRI H.D. DEVE GOWDA : I am prepared to have a discussion...*(Interruptions)*. I am agreeable for a discussion...*(Interruptions)*. You say whatever you want to say...*(Interruptions)*

MR. SPEAKER : Please do not disturb. You must have patience to listen to the Prime Minister.

SHRI H.D. DEVE GOWDA : I have no hesitation for that. If any further information is available, after the Home Minister comes, it will also be supplied to the House...*(Interruptions)*.

[Translation]

SHRI VIJAY GOEL (Sadar-Delhi) : ...*(Interruptions)*
What arrangement is being made regarding the training which are reaching Delhi.

[English]

MR. SPEAKER : Whatever information the Prime Minister had with him he has placed it before the House.

(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER : When I am speaking you cannot interrupt. We will wait for the arrival of the Home Minister and after the Home Minister has made the statement, then we will decide about it.

We will now resume the discussion on the General Budget. Shri Virendra Kumar Singh can continue his speech.

17.24½ hrs.

GENERAL BUDGET 1996-97-GENERAL DISCUSSION - CONTD.

[Translation]

SHRI VIRENDRA KUMAR SINGH : Mr. Speaker, Sir, I was making speaking on the Budget. This budget reflects the social justice and commercial harmony.

17.25 hrs.

(Mr. Deputy Speaker in the Chair)

I donot want to go through the figures but would like to give a suggestion. More than half and nearly 50 per cent people of the country are still 11' illeterate. There are only 38.5 percent educated persons in Bihar. There is need to make people literate and educated. For this purpose, primary and middle schools should be opened in all the villages. Unless the people are educated they will not be able to understand the objective of the budget which should have been gone through by the 90 percent of the people in villages. It is necessary to educate them so that they get all the information. To achieve this aim, schools should be opened everywhere.

Saving should also be encouraged. There should be provision in the Budget to give incentive to saving. When saving is more, investment will be more and thus more employment opportunities will be generated and there will be progress in the country. So I would like to draw the attention of hon. Minister towards it. I thank him for presenting such a budget for 90 percent poor and the farmers.

[English]

SHRI NIRMAL KANTI CHATTERJEE (Dumdum) : Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, I must begin with a confession that on this occasion there are so many things in the Budget which are strikingly new. The speaker from the main Opposition Benches, Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi lacked the flamboyance of the speaker who used to initiate the Budget discussion from that side.

It was also a surprise for me. I have profited from my predecessors speaking here, to hear our ex-Speaker as the initial spokesman from the Congress benches.

Sir, it is also in a way a unique situation under which we are having this discussion on the Budget. It is a Budget of a coalition called the United Front. The United Front has succeeded in generating a common approach and on the basis of that common approach, a Common Minimum Programme has been formulated.

I think, it is pertinent to mention at this initial stage that by definition, almost a Minimum Programme provides a minimum only in the sense that that provides the necessary conditions without necessarily being a sufficient one. For that, perhaps one has to look at the common approach and perhaps also to go beyond that common approach for the simple reason that it is a common approach of 13 political parties. I will have the occasion to comment on this later.

But let me begin with the common approach. Sir, the uniqueness should come from what has been stated