

In this Session, the Departmentally-Related Standing Committees presented 17 Reports.

References were made in the House on the occasion of important anniversaries, namely, the 125th Birth Anniversary of Munshi Premchand, the 63rd Anniversary of the 'Quit India' Movement and the 60th Anniversary of dropping of atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan.

As the hon. Members might have observed, an effort has been made during the Session to streamline the raising of matters of urgent public importance. These matters were hitherto being raised during the so-called 'Zero Hour'.

The number of matters sought to be raised was, however, of late becoming so large that it was very difficult to regulate the raising of such matters. Further, this was also eating into the time allotted for legislative and other business. As agreed to in the Leaders' Meetings - and I am obliged to them - held on 24th of July, 2005, a new procedure has been introduced since 1st of August, 2005. Only five matters of extreme urgent national or international importance are now permitted to be raised during the so-called 'Zero Hour'. The rest of the matters are raised by the Members after 6.00 p.m. About 350 matters of urgent public importance were raised by the Members even by sitting late in the night. The new procedure has not only ensured timely taking up of legislative and other listed business, it has also provided an assured opportunity to Members to raise their matters. Besides, hon. Members also raised 273 matters under Rule 377.

In this Session, we lost over 10 hours of time. A serious incident of breach of discipline took place, which was condemned by almost all sections of the House and it is hoped that in future such act of gross indiscipline will not take place.

The Lok Sabha sat late during the Session for over 36 hours on 18 days to compensate the loss of time due to interruptions etc. and complete the listed business. This was made possible because of the wholehearted support and willing cooperation that we received from all sections of the House. I commend this collective commitment of the Members for effectively participating in the debates with sincerity and enthusiasm.

I take this opportunity to thank all the hon. Members for the kind cooperation extended to me and my colleagues in the Panel of Chairmen in the completion of business of the House. I am extremely grateful to the Leader of the House, the Leader of Opposition, the Leaders of various parties and groups as well as the Chief Whips for their unstinted cooperation and courtesy extended to me and my colleagues. I would also like to thank, on behalf of all of you, the Press and the Media who extended utmost cooperation and sat with us through the late hours. However, on this occasion, I would like to appeal to my friends in the Media to spare

some more space in their coverage of the proceedings of the House, which I feel would enhance the prestige of both these pillars of our democracy. I also thank the officers and the staff of the Lok Sabha Secretariat, Doordarshan, CPWD and other allied agencies for their assistance in the proper running of the House.

Now, the hon. Prime Minister to speak.

THE PRIME MINISTER (DR. MANMOHAN SINGH): Mr. Speaker, Sir, we come to the end of an important Session of the Lok Sabha. Indeed, one could call it a historic Session, for in this Session, we have taken several legislative steps to empower our people, especially the weaker sections of our society, and thereby to strengthen our body politic. Sir, I know there have been trying moments and I once again reiterate my sincere and heartfelt appreciation of your fortitude, wisdom, and your inestimable patience and transparent sincerity in trying to conduct the proceedings of this august House. ...*(Interruptions)*

However, I am sure you will agree with me when I say that in this Session we have been able to transact more business and conduct more meaningful debate than has been the case so far in the 14th Lok Sabha. I would like to place on record my own personal appreciation of your effort in this regard, as well as the appreciation of the Members of this House. I would like to thank the Deputy Speaker and the Panel of Chairmen for their fair conduct of the proceedings of this House. This has enabled us to transact considerable business in the House.

Sir, there has been a visible improvement in the volume of business transacted during this Session including the number of Bills passed and issues discussed through Adjournment Motions and Calling Attention Motions. We were also able to discuss 10 statements made by various Ministers, including the one I made on my visit to the United States.

There is also the qualitative dimension of the quality of debate and discourse. This was certainly of a higher order in this session. In all honesty, I cannot say that I was entirely satisfied with our record in making good use of the time at our disposal. However, I do feel reassured that we were able to do substantial legislative work.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the world looks to us in the practice of democracy. We are a unique example of a developing country of such great diversity seeking its salvation through the framework of an open society and a functioning democracy. I must confess, I felt a deep sense of pride swell up in me as I sat listening to the words of President Hamid Karzai at a function in Kabul yesterday where the foundation stone for the Afghan Parliament was laid. President Karzai held up the example of India and said that our success in democratic governance had shown to the developing world that democracy is not a characteristic of the advanced western

[Dr. Manmohan Singh]

nations alone. That, in fact, "countries of eastern cultures could also present successful examples of democratic politics."

President Karzai said, "India has more than a billion people with different cultures, religions and languages. By facilitating participation from its people, India has been able to make a stable and pluralistic democracy a reality for Indians. Asian and African countries in general, and Afghanistan in particular, can learn much from the rich experience of India." Since, we have an obligation not just to our own people, but the people of the world in making sure that our democracy works, and works for all our people. Billions of people across the world have a stake in the success of our democratic institutions for they too aspire for the freedom and dignity that democracy gives them.

Every Indian will feel pride rushing through his veins listening to such warm appreciation from a friendly neighbour. I salute the people of Afghanistan for the courage, fortitude and wisdom they are showing by embracing democracy as a way of life and of governance. India will do whatever it is called upon to do to strengthen democracy and the freedom of Afghanistan.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, when we speak about the fruits of democracy we are not mouthing empty phrases. I am happy that in this session of Parliament the poorest of our people have been assured an important fruit of democracy, the assurance of gainful employment. Our Government is proud of the Rural Employment Guarantee Bill that this House has approved in this session. We have fulfilled a solemn commitment we had made at the time when our Government came to office. The challenge is now in how well we implement this assurance and ensure that its benefits reach the intended beneficiaries. Great responsibility rests on the shoulders of those charged with the responsibility of implementing the Employment Guarantee Act, particularly on the Panchayati Raj Institutions. Utmost care will be needed in selecting viable projects and in ensuring that there are no leakages and avenues of corruption in the utilization of funds.

Sir, people's faith in democracy is not based on the promises we make, or even on the laws we enact. It is only when the tangible and the not-so-tangible fruits of democracy impact on the lives of the people that their faith is renewed.

We are also proud of the legislation we have passed in this Session empowering our women. The amendments to the Hindu Succession Act fulfil a longstanding promise we had made to our sisters and daughters. Our Government is firmly committed to the empowerment of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, other backward classes and all minorities. We are equally committed to the empowerment of our women.

Sir, a true test of our democracy is its ability to respond to the needs and aspirations of every section of society. I

regret our inability in this session to move ahead on the reservation of seats for women in the highest decision-making bodies of our country. But I reiterate our commitment to this just demand of half of our population.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I must place on record my deep and sincere appreciation of the leadership provided in each of these major acts of legislation by our respected leader, Shrimati Sonia Gandhiji, and the Members of the National Advisory Council that she chairs. They have done their patriotic duty by championing the cause of our people. I do sincerely hope we in Government will rise up to the expectations of our people and renew their confidence in our democracy.

Sir, I wish to thank you once again, and the Deputy Speaker as well as the staff and officers of the Lok Sabha Secretariat for the good work and successful conduct of the business in this Session.

I thank you.

SHRI L. K. ADVANI (Gandhinagar): Mr. Speaker, Sir, Monsoon Session is concluding today and the brief of the business disposed off by the House as mentioned by you in your valedictory speech, is itself reflective of the fact that the Parliament has carried out its responsibility with due diligence. At the same time, speaking on behalf of the Opposition, I can draw satisfaction from the fact that the Opposition, in full awareness of its responsibility and accountability of highlighting the shortcomings of the Government and also of being vocal in doing so when the need arose and in extending its full cooperation when required, have lived upto the expectation of playing the role of a constructive Opposition. I am of the opinion that this is the right approach to carry on the Legislative business for which I express my gratitude to you and those on the treasury benches and would like to congratulate all the officers of the Secretariat as well.

[English]

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. The hon. Members may now stand up for the song, *Vande Matram*.

14.29 hrs.

NATIONAL SONG

The National Song was played

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you very much. The House stands adjourned sine die.

14.30 hrs.

The Lok Sabha then adjourned sine die.
