

two years back. He met Collectors, Chief Secretaries, Panchas and Sarpanchas. But what was the stand and attitude of the Opposition Chief Ministers? They said: "what right the Prime Minister of the country has got to go to Panchs or Sarpanchas and talk to them? What right the Prime Minister of the country has got to talk to a Collector, Lambardar or Tahsildar?" This was the stand taken by the Opposition leaders when the Prime Minister called his conference. This was the conception of our federal structure that these people were holding. This was the challenge for the last two years. But, despite the fact that the Prime Minister had a dialogue right from Chief Secretaries to Panch and this is the product that we have got, certain Chief Ministers of some Opposition ruled States have challenged these aspects. We may recollect that one of the Chief Ministers has said that in our federal structure, the Centre does not exist and the Centre is a myth. This was the stand taken by certain Chief Ministers. In every way, they tried to stall the Panchayat Bill. I would say in all humility that Mahatma Gandhi's dreams are being realised by our Prime Minister. I have no hesitation to say in plain and simple words that in the matter of Panchayat Bill, an attack on Rajiv Gandhi is an attack on Mahatma Gandhi. I would say this in very clear terms. If our Prime Minister has tried to achieve the goals and dreams of Mahatma Gandhi, then an attack on Panchayat Bill is an attack on Mahatma Gandhi.

Sir, there was a time when Ambedkarji had some reservation about whether we should have panchayats at the local level or not. At one time, he thought that upper caste people in the villages may dominate panchayats and therefore we should not fortify panchayats. Perhaps it was true many years back. Today, at this stage, village people are awakened and they like to have democratic rights. In the 40 years of Congress rule in this country, every citizen, every peasant, has become conscious and therefore in the units of panchayats no upper caste man can dominate the lower caste man or a farmer. This apprehension does not hold good. Therefore, we have to fortify our panchayats.

Sir, it has been stated that this Bill attacks the basic structure of the Constitution. I had never been able to understand this. Even when the Supreme Court decided in the Keshvanand Bharati case, there was total confusion among the judges as to what the basic structure of the Constitution means. There exists no basic structure as much. If at all there exists a basic structure of the Constitution, certainly panchayat is the lowest ladder of democracy and must form the basic structure of the Constitution. We are strengthening the basic structure of the Constitution by these Bills, if at all there is any basic structure. These are the high arguments of legal luminaries. If they say that we are changing the basic structure of the Constitution, then this is no argument at all.

Lastly, I would like to make only one submission by way of suggestion. Since major part of the legislation will be enacted by the State Government, I would humbly request the Government of India to include a chapter on Nyaya Panchayats. If the chapter on Nyaya Panchayats is included, then certain petty offences in the villages like small assaults can be stopped by recovering Rs. 500 or Rs. 1000. It can be done at the village level itself by Gram Panchayats so that people may not have to go to Courts of Law. If the Nyaya Panchayat system is incorporated in the village panchayat laws now, they will be enacted by the State Government.

STATEMENT REGARDING ENHANCEMENT OF PENSION AND PROVISION OF ADDITIONAL FACILITIES TO FREEDOM FIGHTERS

[English]

THE PRIME MINISTER (SHRI RAJIV GANDHI): Mr. Speaker, Sir, the 9th of August, 1989 is the anniversary of Quit India Day in the year of the birth centenary of that great freedom fighter and national builder, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. We remember today that

[Sh. Rajiv Gandhi]

historic moment 47 years ago when Mahatma Gandhi launched the final phase of our struggle for freedom. It is a most appropriate occasion for us to honour our noble Swatantrata Sainanis.

When our freedom fighters launched themselves selflessly into the Independence Movement, they sought nothing for themselves while giving their all for the country. Their struggle was for a principle, not for material gain. Their cause was a great ideology, not a narrow chauvinism. Their goal was the freedom of India, and the freedom of all Indians, not a personal or selfish aim. Their higher objective was the end of Empire everywhere and liberty for all the oppressed peoples of the world.

As the beneficiaries of their sacrifice, the duty falls on our generation to extend to them the assistance they so richly deserve, but do not demand.

As a token of our gratitude, appreciation and regard for the swatantrata Sainanis, I am happy to make the following announcements:

- (i) The pension being paid to freedom fighters under the Swatantrata Sainik Samman Pension Scheme 1980 will be enhanced for the freedom fighters, their widows and dependants with effect from 14-11-1988. The rates of pension will be raised from Rs. 500/- p.m. to Rs. 750/- p.m. for the freedom fighters and their widows. The pension of those freedom fighters, who underwent imprisonment outside India for a minimum period of 5 years, will, however, be raised from Rs. 800/- p.m. to Rs. 1,000/- p.m. The rates of pension for their dependants are also being raised;
- (ii) The scheme for free travel by Rail will be extended beyond 18-11-88 for the life time of the freedom fight-

ers; and

- (iii) For the first time, the facility of free Rail travel will be extended to the widows of the freedom fighters.

Sir, I am sure the entire House will wish to join me in wishing our freedom fighters good health and long life.

Thank you.

PROF. SAIFUDDIN SOZ (Baramulla): Many thanks for this progressive and benevolent measure. But what about ex-MPs?

SHRI RAJIV GANDHI: Sir, I would be looking forward to the hon. Member earning a salary for the next term and not looking forward to a pension!

PROF. N. G. RANGA (Guntur): With your permission, Sir, I would like to thank the Prime Minister and the Government for the concessions and the Samman offers they have made today on this sacred day on behalf of the All India Freedom Fighters Organisation and the lakhs of freedom fighters who are fortunately still alive and their wives and dependants.

CONSTITUTION (SIXTY-FOURTH
AMENDMENT) BILL AND CONSTITU-
TION (SIXTY-FIFTH AMENDMENT) BILL-
CONTD.

17.40 hrs.

[Translation]

SHRI MOHD. AYUBKHAN (Jhunjhunu): Mr. Speaker, Sir, Mahatma Gandhi provided a model of the nation, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru infused life in it, Shrimati Indira Gandhi nourished it with her blood and Shri Rajiv Gandhi has taken up the responsibility of realising the dreams of these three leaders. It is a fact that sacrifice never goes unrewarded. The sacrifice made by late Shrimati Indira Gandhi for the unity and integrity of the