

with connoisseurs of art, architecture and literature. Sir, there are people in our embassies who even do not know when Megasthenes came to India. Mr. Speaker, Sir, you will be surprised to know that this is the stuff we find in our embassies sometimes. They must be men of culture, they must know history and they must have intellectual background to represent our country abroad. Mr. Speaker, Sir, I suggest that while assigning people to other countries, we must find out whether the ambassador who is going there to represent our country has that background to represent our country. Otherwise, I think, we will lose our reputation in foreign countries that we have not sent good people, Sir, I will not speak much, Sir, our policy has been that we should be self-reliant and our policy has been to make our nation very strong. We should pursue this policy to its logical conclusion so that our country is reckoned as one of the highest and strongest countries in the world.

With these words, I support the Demands.

STATEMENT RE. : ELECTIONS IN GUJARAT

THE PRIME MINISTER, MINISTER OF ATOMIC ENERGY, MINISTER OF ELECTRONICS, MINISTER OF SPACE, MINISTER OF PLANNING AND MINISTER OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY (SHRIMATI INDIRA GANDHI). Mr. Speaker, Sir, the House is aware that over the weekend, Shri Morarji Desai, one of our distinguished members, has broken his fast.

The earlier decision to hold elections in Gujarat only after the end of the monsoon was because of the severe drought conditions existing at present in large parts of the State and was also in keeping with the accepted convention in the country that General Elections are not held at the height of summer or during the rains in order to minimise inconvenience to the people in the exercise of their franchise.

This decision was not taken lightly or with any political motivation. No question of principle or policy was involved here apart from what we thought was the best for the people of Gujarat. We did not want to do anything against their interests.

The Government of Gujarat is putting in a tremendous effort to alleviate the hardships of the drought affected areas. We genuinely felt that elections now would divert the attention of the Administration and the people from their concentration on this urgent task and necessitate the redeployment of personnel for election work.

SHRI SHYAMNANDAN MISHRA (Begusarai) : President's Rule for fourteen months ?

SHRIMATI INDIRA GANDHI : This could not be in the interest of the people of Gujarat where large numbers of people are on the move, either working on relief projects or taking their cattle to other districts. Even drinking water has to be transported over long distances.

I have never stood on prestige. However, I do feel that fasts of this nature are unjustified and constitute an irrational form of political pressure. Many friends have drawn attention to the fact that Shri Morarji Desai himself was forthright in expressing similar views in the past.

I believe a rumour was spread that we might put off elections. There was no truth in this. Our motives were being misrepresented and our anxieties misunderstood. I had clearly told Shri Morarji Desai, and it had also been stated in Parliament, that elections would be held as soon as possible after the monsoons and that the process would begin in September. If the rains ended sooner, we could have advanced the date of the elections. Thus the issue at stake was only three or four months.

28 hrs.

SHRI SHYMANDAN MISHRA : Completely wrong, Using President's rule for 14 months.

SHRIMATI INDIRA GANDHI : Frankly, this small time lag hardly seemed an adequate reason for such a serious step as the Fast.

However, Shri Morarji Desai did undertake his fast. Medical reports were disquieting. The merits of the case recorded into the background and the prime consideration for us became that of saving Shri Morarji Desai's life. We did not want him to die. So my colleagues and I decided to ask the Election Commission to hold elections in Gujarat around the 7th of June, thus meeting Shri Desai's main point.

SHRI SHYAMNANDAN MISHRA : Why did you speak strongly at Rae-Bareli ?

SHRIMATI INDIRA GANDHI : The exact date will, of course, be fixed by the Election Commission. The summer conditions will, no doubt, impose hardship on the people at various stages of the election process, but we hope that the people of Gujarat will appreciate the underlying reasons for holding the elections earlier.

In my correspondence with Shri Desai, two other questions also figure—the Emergency and the Maintenance of Internal Security Act.

Recent international trends have been far from reassuring. There is feverish military build-up in and around our region.

SHRI SHYMANADAN MISHRA : That is the fiction you are building up.

SHRIMATI INDIRA GANDHI : The threat to our borders is not only on our land frontier but also along our extensive sea coast. The revocation of Emergency at such a time will seriously affect national security.

SHRI SHYAMNANDAN MISHRA : We do not accept this position (*Interruptions*) Emergency will have to go.

SHRIMATI INDIRA GANDHI : The purpose of the Maintenance of Internal Security Act is also to strengthen the nation's hands in dealing with anti-social and anti-national elements. The objective of the Maintenance of Internal Security Act has never been to curtail any legitimate political activity.

SHRI SHYAMNANDAN MISHRA : You have put thousands of political workers in prison.

SHRIMATI INDIRA GANDHI : If there are apprehensions or allegations of the misuse of the Maintenance of Internal Security Act, it will naturally be our responsibility to examine such complaints in consultation with the appropriate State Governments. //

SHRI MADHU LIMAYE (Banka) : This is a useless statement (*Interruptions*)

MR. SPEAKER : The House now stands adjourned to meet again at 11 A.M. tomorrow.

18.05 hrs.

The Lok Sabha then adjourned till Eleven of the Clock on Wednesday, April 16, 1975 (Chaitra 26, 1897 (Saka).