

VALEDICTORY REMARKS

MR. CHAIRMAN; Hon. Members, we come to the end of the 202nd Session that had commenced on Monday, the 5th July, 2004; the House, however, had been in recess from July 24 to August 5

The House bid farewell to the retiring Members and also extended welcome to 67 new Members from as many as 16 States. The new faces have given us a new look. Very importantly, in this Session we got our new Deputy Chairman, whose unanimous election is a well-deserved tribute to his rich qualities of head and heart.

During this Session, the House also adopted the Rules relating to the Committee on Ethics. Another milestone in ensuring probity in the public life was coming into force of the Members of Rajya Sabha (Declaring of Assets and Liabilities) Rules, 2004.

Notwithstanding the delay in the formation of the Department-related Parliamentary Committees, and the limited time at their disposal, the Committees accomplished the stupendous task of presenting their reports in record time. The Chairmen and Members of these Committees deserve our sincere appreciation for their excellent work.

The first Budget of the UPA Government was presented in this Session. The House witnessed very enlightened discussion and debate on the Railway Budget and the General Budget, 2004. Issues of public importance such as flood situation and school text-books were also discussed. Matters of urgent public importance like deaths of children due to malnutrition, incidents of suicide by farmers and disinvestment of Centaur Hotel, Mumbai, were also raised by the Members in the form of Calling Attention.

We had also slated discussion on several important issues of public concern such as population control, inflation, WTO and banking sector issues. We had also decided to discuss the working of six important Ministries. However, none of these discussions could be taken up due to interruptions and adjournments. On some days, even Question Hour was lost. Two days of Private Members' business were also lost. I can only sympathise with them for their disappointment. Hon. Members, we need to introspect whether we have not failed in making contribution to improving governance by denying ourselves the opportunity for in-depth discussion on the programmes, projects and key areas of governance

Hon Members, frequent adjournments and not transacting the business listed for the day have certainly not enhanced the prestige of this august House. On a couple of occasions, I had to express my deep sense of anguish, agony and helplessness. Purposeful conduct of business in the House, I believe, can be conducted only with the cooperation of the Treasury Benches as well as the Opposition, each side showing accommodation, and adjustment to the viewpoint and concerns of the other.

Hon Members, I would urge you to analyse the reasons of turmoil and look into the causes behind the issues that were in the nature of political, emotive, ethics related or touching upon sensitivity of the States. The genesis of these issues runs deep and goes unto the basic weaknesses in our system of governance that are today posing serious challenge and threat to our political system and governance in democracy. Indeed, the issues of reform need to be addressed with a sense of urgency by our Parliament which, as the highest and supreme forum in democracy, has to be a Lighthouse to beckon good governance. It is in this context that I have always highlighted the need for serious consideration in this House on key issues of governance so that through discussions and debates, concrete suggestions and recommendations emerge for appropriate Executive or Legislative follow-up actions.

Hon. Members, I know, all of you are deeply committed to strengthening democracy and promoting people's welfare. This also is the commonly shared concern of every one of you even though there may be differences in approach of action or in political outlook. However, my long innings in public life has taught me that no differences are big enough to remain unresolved if we have the common will to achieve the larger objective of public welfare, provided we are willing and prepared for dialogue and discussion. I would urge leaders of all parties and groups to give a serious thought to the key issues and challenges before us.

Hon Members, now that the heat of the summer is gone and the good monsoon has set in, it should be easy to feel cool and engage in constructive dialogue with a view to find solutions to the basic problems which cause differences and disagreements and to evolve a framework for effective conduct of business of the House in an atmosphere of cordiality, harmony and understanding. This is my fervent hope as well as fond expectation that when we meet next, we should be doing full justice to the legitimate business of the House, and thus ensure that people's faith in parliamentary democracy and institutions of governance is well sustained.

Hon. Members, I take this opportunity to thank the Leader of the House, the Leader of the Opposition, leaders of various parties and groups, and all the Members for their kind cooperation. I also thank the Deputy Chairman, Members on the panel of Vice-Chairman and the staff of the Secretariat for their help and cooperation.

Before we adjourn, I extend to all of you my warm greetings and good wishes for the forthcoming festivals and other auspicious occasions ahead.

THE PRIME MINISTER (DR. MANMOHAN SINGH): Mr. Chairman, Sir, at the very outset, I would like to express to you our grateful thanks for providing us all the guidance that we needed to deal with the challenging issues that seem to derail our Parliament in recent weeks. You have mentioned that we are very fortunate that we were able to elect the Deputy Chairman, hon'ble K. Rahman Khan, unanimously. I thought that was the beginning of a new trend, and I can assure you, Sir, if this result has not materialised, it is not for want of trying on my part or on the part of our Government. At every stage, we have tried to ensure that there is no problem. As you have very rightly said, there can be differences, but no problem is so insoluble that it cannot be resolved through structured dialogue and structured debate. It is with this conviction that we tried our very best to see that differences, if there are any, they should be debated, they should be discussed, and a consensus ought to be evolved as to how our policies and economy are to be managed.

Sir, power is a societal trust. You cannot sit on power. You must spend it. But all of us, who exercise power in varying degrees, have an obligation to our country that this power is utilised for public good, not for promoting narrow sectional gains. Sir, it is with a great deal of sadness that I rise to say a few words, and as I said, if the House has not functioned normally, it is not for want of trying on your part or on the part of the hon. Deputy Chairman or the valiant efforts that have been made by the Secretary-General and his staff. If we have not come up to our expectations, and we have not come up to your expectations, I think, we have to look inside us, and the time has come when all political parties--and I say so not in any narrow party sense of the term--must evolve for themselves a code of conduct for behaviour inside Parliament and outside Parliament. Sir, this was supposed to be the Budget Session. We are a very poor country. We tax even the poorest sections of our population because we have to raise resources to carry out the essential functions of the Indian

State. People of this country expect the hon. Members of Parliament to apply their mind and decide to the best of their ability that the monies that have been voted, are being properly utilised; that the tax system that is being put in place, is serving the wider public good. If this has not happened, it is a sad reflection on all of us. Parliament is the supreme guarantor of Indian Democracy, and if Indian Parliament is not allowed to function, I think we all have to reflect where are we leading this country to. Sir, on my part and on the part of my Government, I assure you that we will lend fullest possible cooperation to you, to the Deputy Chairperson and to the staff of the Rajya Sabha in ensuring that this august House runs as smoothly as possible.

I only hope that the Opposition will play the game according to the prescribed rules of parliamentary democracy. It is only through them that we can serve the wider purposes, the wider causes for which the people of our country have sent us to this august House.

With these words, Sir, I once again thank you, the hon. Deputy Chairman, the hon. Leader of the Opposition, the Secretary-General and his staff for all the guidance that we received from you and other dignitaries in the conduct of the business of this House.

MR. CHAIRMAN. Now, before we adjourn the House *sine die*, we will have the National Song.

(The National Song, "Vande Mataram", was then played)

श्री सभापति : सदन की कार्यवाही अनिश्चित काल के लिए स्थगित की जाती है।

The House then adjourned *sine die* at twenty-two minutes past four of the clock