

RAJYA SABHA

Tuesday, the 2nd February, 2021/13 Magha, 1942 (Saka)

The House met at nine of the clock,

MR. CHAIRMAN in the Chair.

OPENING REMARKS BY THE CHAIRMAN

MR. CHAIRMAN: The Leader of the House, Shri Thaawar Chand Gehlotji, the Leader of the Opposition, Shri Ghulam Nabi Azadji, the Minister of Parliamentary Affairs, Shri Pralhad Joshi, Deputy Chairman, Shri Harivanshji, Leaders of various Parties and Groups in the House, I could sense the enthusiasm on the part of all sections of the House to further move on with this important Session with the hon. President presenting the vision of the Government to Members of both the Houses and the Government presenting the General Budget for the next financial year which focussed on post-Covid recovery and health.

I would like to share with all of you an important landmark that our country has just crossed. It relates to completion of 100 years of representative democracy in our country with the first direct elections to the Imperial and Provincial Legislative Councils held during the winter of 1920 further to the Government of India Act, 1919. Democracy is all about participation of people in the management of public affairs and policy making through their elected representatives. The occasion of being a hundred year old modern representative democracy calls for serious reflection on the state of democracy and the functioning of the Legislature in our country. In this connection, my appeal to all of you is to try and make the Session more purposeful. The issues that need to be discussed could be discussed threadbare in a peaceful, orderly and dignified manner. Last time some unfortunate incidents happened. I don't want to recall them. But it is binding on all of us to see to it that the House runs properly, Members follow rules and regulations, maintain discipline and dignity and also participate in debates in a meaningful manner. I have all along been appealing to Members to prevent any situation which would affect the interest of the Parliament and also the nation.

On the landmark occasion of 100 years of representative democracy in our country, I suggest to this august House to resolve to enhance the dignity of the House through proceedings as per the rules and convention of this House. A prolonged discussion of over 20 hours on the Motion of Thanks to President's Address to both

the Houses and also the General Budget would offer ample opportunities to raise and discuss a wide range of issues of public concern to which the Government will respond. I am happy to recall the assurance given by Leaders of all Groups and Parties in the meeting held at my residence on Sunday. I sincerely hope that this important Budget Session will turn out to be highly productive in the spirit of the last four Sessions.

During the inter-Session period, eight Department-related Parliamentary Standing Committees of Rajya Sabha worked overtime and held a total of 55 sittings. These Committees met for a total duration of 110 hours and four minutes, which comes to an average duration of two hours and seven minutes. This is an improvement over the previous average of one hour fifty-four minutes for each meeting. I hope the duration of the meetings would further rise given the efforts and the costs involved. The Committee on Commerce has reported substantial improvement, holding ten meetings during the inter-Session period for a total duration of 26 hours 18 minutes. The average duration of each meeting has increased to two hours thirty-seven minutes against the average duration of just one hour forty-two minutes earlier. The Committee on Transport, Tourism and Culture held the highest number of eleven meetings for a total period of 22 hours. I think the Committee has even visited Jammu & Kashmir. The Committee on Education, Women, Children, Youth & Sports reported the highest average attendance of 53.45 per cent in seven meetings. I compliment the Chairmen and Members of all the eight Committees and the Secretariat for their spirited work during the inter-session period on behalf of the Parliament. Six Committees of Rajya Sabha during the inter-Session period spent thirty-eight hours and thirty-four minutes discussing various aspects of the outbreak of pandemic, its consequences and management. This was in addition to the discussion on the pandemic-related issues by the Committee during the July-August last year. I am happy to inform the House that these Committees of Rajya Sabha have examined the pandemic-related issues in bipartisan and constructive manner, not as a fault-finding, to provide a guidance for such sudden challenges in future. These Committees have also complemented the efforts of the Government, the people and all the stakeholders and also pointed out the shortcomings in handling the pandemic challenge. I would like to share with you that I was very happy when I went through the Reports and deliberations of the Standing Committees, how Members have participated and made constructive suggestions and tried to elicit as much information as possible. I compliment the Chairmen and Members of all these

Standing Committees for the good work that they have done in discussing and preparing the Reports.

I would also like to share with all of you another important development regarding the Members of this august House speaking in their mother tongue. You may recall that the Chairman of this august House has been urging all of you to speak in native languages. Simultaneous interpretation service has been made available for all the twenty-two Scheduled languages. During the last two years, the use of regional languages -- regional means 'native languages'; I don't feel comfortable with the words 'regional languages' -- has risen to five times. In addition, four languages, namely, Dogri, Kashmiri, Konkani and Santhali have been used for the first time in the House since its inception in 1952 and a few other local languages were also used after a gap of several years. I hope the use of mother tongue in the proceedings of this House would further increase. Hon. Home Minister is here in the House. I would suggest to the hon. Home Minister to see that his Ministry, which is in charge of implementation of the Official Languages Act, try to promote as many languages as possible in the administration of the Government and also take initiative to see that the judiciary and the local administration also understand the spirit of this move and try to encourage the use of languages. The Ministry of Home and the Ministry of HRD can take further initiatives to see that translation facilities are made available. I hope that the Government and also the hon. Members take this suggestion in right spirit and then move on.

The change between the same time last year and now is perceptible. When the pandemic broke out last year, we hardly had testing facilities, quality masks and personal protection equipment required to handle the pandemic. A year later, our country, besides successfully containing the pandemic, has emerged as the hope for other countries, has indigenously made vaccines and become the vaccine factory of the world. This is a remarkable transformation. The House places, on its record, its appreciation of the people concerned for the same. I once again reiterate the importance of the Budget Session and need to ensure smooth and effective functioning of the House and utilisation of this Zero Hour, Question Hour and all other provisions that are available. ...*(Interruptions)*...

SHRI JAIRAM RAMESH (Karnataka): Is there Zero Hour today?

MR. CHAIRMAN: I know what is happening. Since I know what is happening, I keep in mind what is required. I hope you will be cooperative. I am sure about it.
