

*[Answers to Starred and Un-starred Questions (Both in English and Hindi) are available as Part -I to this Debate, published electronically on the Rajya Sabha website under the link <https://sansad.in/rs/debates/officials> ]*

1.00 P.M.

### **† MOTION OF THANKS ON THE PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS**

MR. CHAIRMAN: Now, further discussion on the Motion moved by Ms. Kavita Patidar on the 2nd February, 2024 and the Amendments moved thereto. The next speaker is Shri Sukhendu Sekhar Ray.

SHRI SUKHENDU SEKHAR RAY (West Bengal): Sir, at the outset, I would like to respectfully submit that in the Address to both the Houses of Parliament by the hon. President of India, I have found after 'एक भारत श्रेष्ठ भारत' and 'आत्मनिर्भर भारत' some new coins like 'विकसित भारत', which is used, at least, for six times, and 'अमृत', expressed for about ten times, such as 'आजादी का अमृत काल', अमृत काल of our Independence, 'अमृत कलश', 'अमृत सरोवर', अमृत महोत्सव twice, अमृत वाटिका, 'अमृत भारत स्टेशन', 'अमृत भारत ट्रेन' and 'अमृत जनरेशन'. So, चारों ओर सिर्फ अमृत ही अमृत है। जो लोग ये अमृत पी रहे हैं, उनकी बात छोड़ दीजिए। जो लोग हलाहल पी रहे हैं, यानी जो लोग जहर पी रहे हैं, उनके लिए यह सोचने की बात है कि ये अमृत लोक में बात कर रहे हैं, ये अमृत लोक में जीवित हैं या दूसरे लोक में तो नहीं चले गए हैं। अमृत लोक सुनते-सुनते उनको परलोक की याद आ रही है। It is a make-belief situation. How it has been coined like *Amrit Kaal* in every sphere of life of the society, I do not understand it. Anyway, it is a prerogative of the Government. At page No.3 of the booklet, it is said, "Last year, my Government has given Government jobs to lakhs of youth in mission mode." It is not in the distant past that we heard about that two crores of jobs per year will be given to the jobless. By this time, the number ought to have been twenty crores because this Government has already spent ten years in power.

[THE VICE-CHAIRPERSON (DR. AMEE YAJNIK) *in the Chair.*]

When it is said 'lakhs of jobs', the natural question comes 'How many lakhs?' There is no mention about this. How many jobless are there and out of them how

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† Further discussion continued on a motion moved on the 2<sup>nd</sup> February, 2024.

many jobless are given jobs and how many are remaining? These are the pertinent questions which have not been addressed by the hon. President in her Speech which has been prepared by this Government. Should we take it as another *jumla*?

At page 4 of the Speech, it is stated that the Government enacted important legislations with the co-operation of all the parliamentarians, including that draconian law, Nyaya Sanhita, which, according to me, is '*Anyaya Sanhita*'. Anyway, this claim that all the parliamentarians supported the Bills, when these were introduced and discussed, is not true. This is incorrect information.

As a keen reader of history, it reminds me of a situation in the year 1933 when Hitler in Germany brought one Enabling Act which enabled his Cabinet to legislate instead of the Parliament and for which no presidential assent was required. What happened then? The law was passed. It was called the Enabling Act. It was passed in Hitler's regime in Germany in 1933 after sending 106 parliamentarians to the concentration camp, and thereafter the Bill was passed. Here, we have seen that after the suspension of 146 parliamentarians, these Bills were passed. This number, that is, the suspension of 146 parliamentarians in Indian Parliament, is the highest in the history of parliamentary democracies around the world so far. Therefore, the statement made in the hon. President's Speech, I should not say that it is far from truth, but it is incorrect and purposefully given by the Government to create a confusion in the minds of the people.

At page 6, paragraph 9 of the Speech, it is stated that NITI Aayog claimed that about 25 crore countrymen have been lifted out of poverty in the last one decade, that is, during this *Amrit Kaal*. My question is that out of how many poverty-ridden people, these 25 crore people have been lifted out of poverty as claimed by the NITI Aayog. What was the exact number of poverty-ridden people when they came to power in 2014, and out of them, when they say that they have lifted 25 crore countrymen out of poverty, how many still remain poverty-ridden? These questions have not been addressed. Therefore, all these are half-truths. I am sorry to say that in this way, a series of lofty claims have been made in this report card of the Government to carry out disinformation campaign on the eve of the Lok Sabha elections. The reality is altogether different.

I would like to refer to Article 39(b) of the Constitution. It is under the Directive Principles of State Policy. It states categorically, "The State shall, in particular, direct its policy towards securing-- (b) that the ownership and control of the material resources of the community are so distributed as best to subserve the common good." Then, Article 39(c) states further, -- you are very much aware, Madam --

"(c) that the operation of the economic system does not result in the concentration of wealth and means of production to the common detriment."

Now, what is happening? What is the scenario of the Indian economy? Inequality has gone to what extent? I may kindly be permitted to refer to a few points from the Oxfam Report 2023, which was released on 15<sup>th</sup> January this year. The Government does not accept that Report but we very much put reliance on this report because of the practical situation in the country.

Number one, the richest one per cent in India own more than 40 per cent of the country's total wealth. Number two, the bottom half of the population share just three per cent of the national wealth. Number three, the Indian Government recently cut taxes on corporate sector while introducing the centralised tax system, that is, GST which led to increase in indirect taxation on household.

A one-time two per cent tax on billionaires' entire wealth would support Rupees 40,423 crore for malnourished individuals for the next three years and you are giving concessions to the corporates. The female workers earned only 63 paisa for one rupee earned by male worker. Scheduled Caste and rural workers earned significantly less than socially advantageous groups. Madam, the point I am going to make is very much pertinent. Billionaires in India witnessed 121 per cent surge in wealth since the pandemic began. Until November, 2022, the surge in their wealth goes on. During the pandemic, it was 121 per cent surge.

One particular Indian billionaire whose portfolio includes energy companies has seen his wealth soar by 46 per cent in 2022. Sixty-four per cent of the total GST came from the bottom 50 per cent of the country's population in 2021-22. The total number of billionaires in India went up from 102 in 2020 to 166 in 2022. India's hundred richest persons' combined wealth reached US \$ 660 billion, which is Rs. 54.12 lakh crore as per Indian currency. It is economic inequality, which must be resisted as per the directive of the Constitution enshrined in Article 39 B and C.

In India, 72 TV channels having a reach over 800 million people are owned by one particular billionaire. In India, a one-off tax on unrealized gains from 2017-2021 on just one billionaire could have raised US\$ 21.95 billion, enough to employ more than five million Indian primary school teachers for a year. Such a huge economic inequality and we are chanting the mantra of *amrit kaal*, *amrit mahotsav*, *amrit*, *amrit*, *amrit*!

Forget about Oxfam Report because the Government does not believe in that report. Let me mention what the UNDP Report says. It is the Asia Pacific Human Development Report of 2024 released on 15<sup>th</sup> of January this year. Let me mention three, four bullet points. In India, income distribution has become more skewed with

top ten per cent of the population getting 57 per cent of national income. This is the UNDP Report.

Top one per cent get 22 per cent of the national income indicating one of the most unequal income distribution. Top ten per cent of the population control 65 per cent of the nation's total wealth highlighting significant wealth inequality. There is a growing evidence of a strong rise in wealth inequality, particularly, in the post-Covid period. Another point in the UNDP report is that women constitute only 23 per cent of the labour force and certain groups like informal workers and inter-State migrants are at greater risk of falling back into poverty. My submission is that unless this huge inequality is removed on war footing, one cannot rule out the possibility of social unrest or upheaval.

I will now talk about rural wage rates and inequality. In case of agriculture labour, real wage rate increased by 4.6 per cent. The real wage rates of non-agriculture and construction workers lowered at the end of the period from 2014 to 2022. Non-agriculture workers form the majority; they are 68.9 per cent among the employed in rural India. Real wages have not grown of approximately 35 per cent of India's workforce since 2014. For long 10 years, in *Amrit Kaal*, there has been no rise in the real wages of 35 per cent of India's workforce. Even in sectors which have increase in real wage rates, the growth rate is overshadowed by the overall per capita income growth. So, this mismatch must be looked into by the Government. There is no murmur, no whisper about how this problem will be solved by the Government in the hon. President's speech.

Now, after the UNDP Report, I will talk about the Labour Bureau Report. What is the Labour Bureau Report? In fact, since I have already talked about the workforce, I am not going to repeat the issue of Labour Bureau Report now.

I will now come to the question of federalism. When this Government came to power, everybody listened again and again, repeatedly, that this Government believes in cooperative federalism. Now, it is not being mentioned because it has already become non-cooperative federalism. The glaring example of federalism is that every State which is ruled by the opposition parties, their leaders are being hounded by the Central agencies. Never in the history of India has this happened. We require the double engine Government! Therefore, this opposition-ruled Government are to be dislodged by hook or crook. This is going on every day. Even a *dalit* Chief Minister has not been spared. From where does the 'One Nation One Election' call come? Is it there in our Constitution? Has it been recommended by the Election Commission? Surprisingly, the retired President of India has been appointed to head a Committee and that Committee has now started discussing on war footing that it is to be

implemented as soon as possible. Our Chief Minister, Ms. Mamata Banerjee, has already written to the Committee -- she is also coming to attend the meeting tomorrow -- that nothing will be accepted by our State at least on this issue. I sincerely believe that the other opposition-ruled States will also not accept it because there will be serious ramifications, serious consequences. This is draconian. Our constitutional scheme is altogether different. We are a parliamentary democracy, not a Presidential form of Government, like the USA. But this will open the door for the Presidential form of Government, I apprehend. That is why I totally oppose this idea of 'One Nation One Election'.

There is a consistent tendency to erode the fiscal and economic policy space of State Governments. Resources transferred to States have been subject to regressive conditions and a significant portion is kept out of the Finance Commission's ambit allowing Central control over their issues. Why is this Government not following the recommendations of the Sarkaria Commission? And what about the second Commission, the Punchhi Commission on Centre-State relations? In 2010, Justice Punchhi Commission submitted its recommendations to the then Government. We are in 2024. Fourteen years elapsed. No murmur about those recommendations. Are fourteen years not enough to finalise the recommendations on the Centre-State relations recommended by the Punchhi Commission? Why is the Government avoiding that? It is because when it comes to the constitutional heads of States, the heads will roll if the Commission's recommendations are given effect to. The Punchhi Commission has categorically stated that while appointing Governors, the State Governments must be consulted and their concurrence is must. They must not act as agents of the Central Government as it is happening now.

Madam, I have already mentioned about the rampant misuse of Central agencies. Now I am driving points relating to my State and how this federalism is being respected. Only one or two points. The Centre has resorted to fiscal terrorism in Bengal. Fiscal terrorism is going on in our State by the Centre. How many Central teams were sent to Bengal? More than hundred. Some 150-160 teams were sent to Bengal to look into the implementation of the Centrally Sponsored Schemes. Wherever deficiencies or defects were found, each and every deficiency and defects were removed and intimated. In the entire country, West Bengal has been singled out and all the dues, to the extent of Rs.1,16,000 crore, the Central Government has stopped. It is an economic blockade. They want to kill the poor people. It is fiscal terrorism. They thought that by suspending the release of funds, it will have good effect for them in the ensuing election. No. People have understood what is what.

The other day, on 3<sup>rd</sup> February, our hon. Chief Minister announced that the State Government from its own funds will give the dues of the 21 lakh workers who could not get the wages. They will be paid out of the State funds. We are not depending upon the Central Funds. We will definitely take the issue to the people and the people of Bengal will give a befitting reply for such fiscal anarchy. There are other points about MGNREGA, but my time is limited. I have almost two minutes now.

While concluding, I would like to respond in reference to paragraph 37 of the President's speech. I don't like to mention, due to paucity of time, what is said there. But everybody knows it because that is the concluding paragraph. I would like to quote a few lines from a Bengali poem of Rabindranath Tagore. It was written 123 years back. The name of the poem is *Deeno Daan*. *Deeno* means 'poor'. *Daan* means 'gift'.

'There is no god in that temple', said the Saint. The King was enraged. 'No God? Oh Saint, aren't you speaking like an atheist? On the throne studded with priceless gems, beams the golden idol. And yet, you proclaim that's empty?'

"It's not empty;  
It's rather full of the Royal pride.  
You have bestowed yourself,  
oh King, not the God of this world, remarked the saint."

And it continued:  
"In the very year in which,  
twenty million of your subjects were struck by a terrible drought;  
The desperate masses without any food or shelter,  
came begging at your door crying for help, only to be turned away,  
they were forced to take refuge in forests, caves, camping under roadside foliages,  
derelict old temples;  
and in that very year  
when you spent two million gold coins to build that grand temple of yours,  
that is the day God left that Temple of yours.  
And joined the poor.  
Your mundane temple is hollow.  
It is just a bubble of wealth and pride.  
The enraged King howled,  
Oh you sham cretin of a person,  
Leave my kingdom this instant.

The Saint replied calmly,  
To the very place to which you have exiled the Divine,  
banish now the devout too."

Thank you, Madam.

THE VICE-CHAIRPERSON (DR. AMEE YAJNIK): Before we go to the next speaker, hon. Members, the discussion on Motion of Thanks on the President's Address will continue after the introduction of the Bills.

We now take the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Amendment) Bill, 2024. Shri Arjun Munda to move for leave to introduce the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Amendment) Bill, 2024.

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## GOVERNMENT BILLS

### The Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Amendment) Bill, 2024

जनजातीय कार्य मंत्री; तथा कृषि एवं किसान कल्याण मंत्री (श्री अर्जुन मुंडा): महोदया, मैं प्रस्ताव करता हूँ:

"कि आन्ध्र प्रदेश राज्य के संबंध में संविधान (अनुसूचित जनजाति) आदेश (संशोधन) विधेयक, 2024 को पुरःस्थापित करने की अनुमति दी जाए।"

*The question was put and the motion was adopted.*

श्री अर्जुन मुंडा: महोदया, मैं विधेयक को पुरःस्थापित करता हूँ।

THE VICE-CHAIRPERSON (DR. AMEE YAJNIK): We now take the Constitution (Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes) Orders (Amendment) Bill, 2024. Shri Arjun Munda to move for leave to introduce the Constitution (Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes) Orders (Amendment) Bill, 2024.

### The Constitution (Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes) Orders (Amendment) Bill, 2024

जनजातीय कार्य मंत्री; तथा कृषि एवं किसान कल्याण मंत्री (श्री अर्जुन मुंडा): महोदया, मैं प्रस्ताव