

Rest of the Special Mentions will be taken up later in the day.

#GENERAL DISCUSSION

***The Union Budget, 2024-25**

and

***The Budget of Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, 2024-25**

MR. CHAIRMAN: All the Members who had given their names to participate in the General Discussion on the Union Budget 2024-25 and the Budget of Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir 2024-25 have already participated. Now, the hon. Minister of Finance will reply to the discussion; hon. Minister of Finance.

THE MINISTER OF FINANCE; AND THE MINISTER OF CORPORATE AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI NIRMALA SITHARAMAN): Thank you very much, hon. Chairman Sir. There has been a very robust discussion on the Budget. I understand 83 speakers have participated in the discussion that actually shows the interest that hon. Members have taken on the topic. After a brief introduction which I would like to begin with, I would go by issues clubbing several Members who have spoken on a particular issue and so on for various different issues. I will also try to refer to the names of the hon. Members who have raised these issues while answering.

Sir, this Budget of 2024-25, is actually a continuation of the Interim Budget. So, the features, the critical aspects of the Interim Budget are naturally subsumed into this regular Budget. Since, 2014, the principle which has guided us is the 'Sabka Sath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas and Sabka Prayas' which continues in this Budget as well and hopefully will guide for the next five years, this set of five years being very critical in taking the first steps towards building a 'Viksit Bharat' by 2047. This Budget strikes a fine balance amongst several overriding priorities; growth, employment, welfare spending, capital investments and fiscal consolidation are all equally given a place and we have tried balancing all of them.

Sir, I had promised in this House in 2021-22, the Government would endeavour to attain a fiscal deficit to the GDP level below 4.5 per cent by the year 2025-26. We

Further general discussion continued from 30.07.2024.

* Discussed together.

had reached an unprecedented high number of 9.2 per cent in the year 2020-21 and we are well on track to attain that target.

According to the IMF, India's share in the global growth is 16 per cent and it is also rising. While this Budget seeks to consolidate our earlier accomplishments, I have announced a slew of measures aimed at providing renewed impetus to the manufacturing sector.

I would just like to take a few minutes on expanding on this. The aim is to boost domestic employment, create employment opportunities and ensure high and sustained increase in India's share in the global GDP over the next five years. Several measures have been taken. In this Budget, in particular, we had mentioned about the Basic Customs Duty which has been reduced on specific items. Together with the Production Linked Incentives given for mobiles, India, now, already produces 97 per cent of all total mobile phones in demand in the country. And, 30 per cent of total production in India, in the year 2024, has gone for exports, exclusively. So, India's Production Linked Incentive Scheme stands out as a successful scheme. Taking this one example, and in the other thirteen sectors also, — there are fourteen altogether — we see a lot of interest in investing and producing, so that India becomes a manufacturing hub. The PLI Scheme which was brought in because we wanted to attract a lot of investment into India is seeing a lot of interest and continues to see a lot of interest in investors.

Further, in this Budget, we have also set up a critical mineral mission for domestic production and for recycling of critical minerals. We are also envisaging overseas acquisitions of critical mineral assets. Further, we fully exempted the Customs Duty on 25 critical minerals and reduced the Basic Customs Duty on two of them. The two were differentiated from the rest for particular reasons. So, there is reduction in two and full exemption for 25 other critical minerals.

I have also announced the development of investment ready plug-and-play industrial parks in and around 100 cities of India. That would immediately be a big attraction for people to come and set up businesses. Being closer to cities, it will enable them to have good skilled workforce to be employed. We are working towards establishing three Centres of Excellence in top educational institutions for realising the vision of 'Make AI in India and Make AI work for India.' That was mentioned in the Budget 2022-23. We are further strengthening the AI Excellence Centres being built in top educational institutions.

Sir, in March, 2024, the Government approved e-Vehicle Policy to promote India as a manufacturing destination, so that e-vehicles, with the latest technology, can be manufactured in our country.

Furthermore, I go back to the point I had made in 2021 Budget about the new Public Sector Enterprises Policy which clearly opened up all sectors in India for private participation also. Public sector will continue in critical core sector and strategically important sectors. But, private sector has now been allowed into every sector; none of which is reserved for public sector alone. I take the example of space sector here. Opening up of this sector has helped and, today, space sector StartUps are receiving funds and India is now becoming a big hub for space sector innovation and space sector StartUps. The recent newspaper announcements have clearly been stating the kind of investment interest being generated. The figures are not readily available with me. But, I know that US\$ 126 million funding was received by StartUps in 2023. But, the flow continues. Further, both in the last year's Budget and this year, we have allocated resources for the National Research Foundation under the National Research Foundation Act, 2023.

This time also, the Anusandhan Research Foundation has had allocation we made. Last year itself, we declared Rs. 50,000 crores for over five years for research, along with private sector. So, in these ways, we have tried making India an attractive manufacturing destination and given good incentives and impetus for manufacturing to set up business in India.

Now, a brief look at some highlights of the numbers that I want to speak about. The total expenditure in the Union Government's Budget Statement 2024-25 is Rs. 48.21 lakh crores. The total expenditure in the regular Budget, 2024-25, is Rs. 54,744 crores more than that of the Interim Budget, which was presented in February, this year. The highlight, which I would like to draw the attention of the hon. Members, is that the capital expenditure is pegged at Rs. 11 lakh crores. And, this is one of the biggest-ever allocation made for capital expenditure. And, this shows a 17 per cent increase over the provisional actuals of Financial Year 2023-24. Seventeen per cent increase over the last year! But, in this context, I would like to highlight one important fact about the capital expenditure, which happened during the UPA era. The CapEx allocation was Rs. 13.19 lakh crores from 2004-05 to 2013-14. The ten years of UPA saw Rs. 13.19 lakh crores; whereas, during our tenure, ending 2024, the allocation for capital expenditure is Rs. 43.82 lakh crores. So, the emphasis that we have given, particularly after COVID, is that the capital expenditure, being one of the very important routes through which the economic revival can be planned, has actually shown results, but the actual numbers are these.

There is also interest among Members to know if the transfer to the States has been proper and as has been recommended by the Finance Commissions. I would like to underline an unflinching commitment to cooperative federalism. The total

resources proposed to be transferred to the States this year, that is, 2024-25 is estimated to be Rs. 22.91 lakh crores. This actually entails an increase of about Rs. 2.49 lakh crores over 2023-24. Even compared to last year, it is an increase of about Rs. 2.49 lakh crores. Similarly, the outlays for all Union Territories have also increased from Rs. 61,118 crores in 2023-24 to Rs. 68,660 crores in 2024-25. So, the States and the Union Territories are clearly getting, and getting in time, the resources which are expected to be released for them.

Although the Budget documents have details of different schemes, yet I am moving over to this point about sectoral allocations. So, there is this interest to know if the allocations for certain particular sectors have increased or decreased, I would like to just give a comparative picture. Agricultural and allied sectors, in 2024-25, received Rs. 1.52 lakh crores, which is Rs. 8,000 crores more than the last year; there is no reduction. Just for comparison, in 2013-14, when the UPA term was over, they had given only Rs. 30,000 crores; Rs. 30,000 crores then and Rs. 1.52 lakh crores now!

Sir, in the 2024-25 Budget, the allocation for education, employment and skilling is Rs.1.48 lakh crores; it is Rs.28,000 crores more than the last year whereas, again, in 2013-14, it was only Rs.85,000 crores. For women and girls, the allocation in the current Budget is Rs.3.27 lakh crores, which is 41 per cent, that is, Rs.96,000 crores more allocation compared to the previous year. It was Rs.96,000 crores in 2013-14. Similarly, for rural development, in 2024-25, the current Budget gives Rs.2.66 lakh crores, Rs.28,000 crores more as compared to last year and it was just Rs.87,000 crores in 2013-14. For urban development, the allocation is Rs.83,000 crores. It is Rs.7,000 crores more than the last year. It was Rs.12,000 crores in 2013-14. For health and social welfare, the allocation is Rs.1.46 lakh crores. Compared to last year, it is Rs.3,000 crores more than the last year and it is Rs.72,000 crores more than 2013-14. I have already mentioned about the fiscal deficit. I just want to highlight that we had projected 5.1 per cent of the GDP as the fiscal deficit in the Interim Budget, whereas now, when we have presented the regular Budget for this year, it has been brought down further to 4.9 per cent and we aim to reach the deficit below 4.5 per cent next year, sticking to the glide path given in 2020-21. It was also said in the Budget speech that from 2026-27 onwards, our endeavour will be to adhere to a path that ensures that the Central Government's debt, as a percentage of GDP, is on the declining trend. Our focus will be on that.

Sir, I would like to mention in this august House that the weighted average yield, which is broadly the one which corresponds to the average cost of borrowing of the Central Government's securities issued during the ten years period of 2014-15 to

2023-24, is lower by about 60 basis points than the period between 2004-05 to 2013-14. I am giving a very notional idea but it helps to put all things in perspective. If the borrowings in UPA-I and UPA-II were near the rates obtained by us, -- I know it is determined by so many other factors, market and so on - which could have been possible if they had our policies and our kind of credibility, it would have resulted in notional interest savings of approximately Rs.35,000 crores for the Government. Just to bring in the perspective, -- you can always be questioned saying, oh! how can you bring a notional -- this points to recognition of this Government's fiscal management. And, this observation, the Government's fiscal management prowess, is an observation of global observers, domain experts and, of course, dispassionate economists that the fiscal management of this Government, which is a typical good feature, which the then hon. CM of Gujarat and now the PM of country has always maintained, namely, fiscal prudence, is one of the very important governance principles. Hon. Members would, therefore, be pleased to know that with all these macro-economic stability related features, the IMF has recently upgraded India's gross domestic product growth in the year 2024-25 to seven per cent. So, from an exceptionally low hit GDP growth during Covid, within a few years to rise to be the fastest growing economy in the world, I think could not have been possible without the hard work and toil of all Indians.... -- irrespective of the sectors in which they are, whether farmers, workers, informal sector workers, construction workers, the entrepreneurs, the MSMEs and so on -- and the visionary leadership, which has a futuristic vision, because from the front, the Prime Minister leads the economy, and we are able to achieve this.

Sir, I also presented the Budget for the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir. I just want to highlight a few important features before I move on to responding to hon. Members' issues which they had raised on the Budget. I am happy to inform about the concrete steps that have been taken by the Union Territory Administration to free itself from the legacy fiscal distress-related issues which they had inherited from the erstwhile State, and this has borne good results. With substantial financial support given by the Government of India, Rs. 17,000 crores have been provided as support in the Union Budget of UT this year. The fiscal deficit to GSTP ratio of the Union Territory of J&K is estimated at 3 per cent for the Financial Year, 2024-25. There is clearly a sign that public finances of UT of Jammu and Kashmir is now back on the rails. The Government has worked very hard, unhindered, towards fulfilling the development aspirations of the people of Jammu and Kashmir with great sense of fiscal responsibility. Because I am dealing with Jammu and Kashmir Budget now and later I go to the General Budget, there are issues which have been raised about J&K

Budget which has been tabled in this House, both inside and outside of this august House.

Now, I take this opportunity with your permission, Sir, to address issues which have been raised in this House and equally because of importance given of those issues which have been raised outside as well. Sir, the first issue is, borrowings have risen from Rs. 12,000 crores to Rs. 24,000 crores in the last two years and it is unprecedented, and it shows fiscal mismanagement. This is an allegation. I would like to respond, Sir. Unlike other States and Union territories, J&K has been plagued with pressures from externally-sponsored terrorism. This is not a secret. All of us know it. In addition, historical legacy of poor governance -- and I reiterate this point, Sir, historical legacy of poor governance -- and low-revenue base had created a situation of near-perpetual distress and dependence on the Union Government, just no way in which the State could have run without the Union helping them, and that is how the main feature of J&K's State's Budget was and also the economy was. Given this kind of a legacy, inheritance that we have got, as part of the efforts to correct lingering fiscal distortions and for enabling transparent disclosure of the fiscal situation, the Union Territory Administration has brought off-budget borrowings onto its books. This has been done within the borrowing ceiling allowed to the Union Territory in each of the years which have gone by. So this is something which I have to state with conviction that the UT was permitted to undertake additional borrowings against unutilized borrowing space from the previous years to take off-budget borrowings on the Budget and finance its expenditure commitments.

Sir, the questions also, or the allegations also, were that fiscal deficit was pegged at 1.6 per cent and it has turned to 5.36 in FY '24, more than three times the original estimate, and also that the Capex has been slashed by 10 per cent. The question, therefore was, will the Central Government take blame for fiscal profligacy at the State level? I would like to dispel any confusion in the minds of people. Along with the special support of Rs. 17,000 crore which has been announced in this Budget from the Union Government, several other things are happening along with the efforts in recent past would reduce the fiscal deficit, and I hope it will reduce the fiscal deficit to 3.3 per cent actually in 2024-25.

So, it is not just the Rs.17,000 crores that has been given as a special support, but also because of the efforts which have been put in the last few years. I think fiscal deficit will be back at 3 per cent. While tax revenue has seen impressive growth, efforts on metering has improved building and collection efficiency in the power sector and that has also resulted in non-tax revenues increasing from Rs.5,148 crores in 2022-23 to Rs.6,500 crores in 2023-24. It is a big reform step that has been

taken, well received by the people, and as a result of which we are able to have collection efficiency in the power sector and I appreciate the J&K Administration for having taken this effort which is showing results for its own benefit. The Union Territory has other very important points -- this is a point which I submit to your consideration and for the august House to recognise -- that it discontinued the earlier practices of running *Hundis* and overdrafts from J&K Bank for its day-to-day cash management. This was a feature. Every year, this would literally be a burden on J&K Bank, and equally, a lazy comfort for the administration, that they could do this operation with the J&K Bank and get away with being transparent in the way in which they handled their accounts. I am glad that this practice has been discontinued. During the last four years, the J&K Bank has made a remarkable turnaround. From a loss-making bank of Rs.1,139 crores of rupees in 2019-20, the bank has now made a profit of Rs.1,700 crores in the year 2023-24. So, that is the kind of turnaround and that is the kind of efficiency with which the bank is now performing, being run professionally since after 2019. Capital expenditure for the Union Territory has also increased from Rs.10,634 crore rupees in 2022- 23, to Rs.12,101 crore in 2023-24, recording a 13.8% growth. So, J&K, Union territory and their situation is in a healthy fiscal situation being able to meet the development aspirations of the State. One other point of criticism, if I may say so, has been that the State's tax to GDP ratio increased from 5 per cent to 8 per cent in three years. Does this mean the people of J&K are subject to heavy taxation without any corresponding increase in their welfare? This is one of the questions asked. I like to highlight that J&K's higher tax to GDP ratio is due to better compliance and effective monitoring of the taxation system. I would like to mention that with the introduction of GST, the tax rate across the country is the same on all GST products. The rate of taxation on non-GST items are either at par with other States or only lower and not higher in J&K. Revenues from GST, motor spirit tax, excise, stamp duties were Rs.9,467 crores in 2019-20. It has increased to Rs.13,903 crores in the year 2023-24. So the administration is showing efficiency in collecting from non-GST tax also. And as a result, the fiscal health of the State is also improving. So the UT has also given care to expand the dealer registrations, improved GST return compliances, initiated a lot of e-stamping systems and conducted transparent excise auctions, very important, Sir, transparent excise auctions.

So, that itself gives a lot of confidence about the way in which J&K Administration is moving. On the employment rates, for 15 to 59 year olds, the unemployment rate has come down from 6.4 per cent in 2020-21, gradually to 5.7 per cent in 2021-22, and to 4.4 per cent in 2022-23. This has become possible because

of substantial public investments that have led to creation of avenues of employment opportunities.

I would like the hon. Members and yourself, the hon. Chairman, Sir, to listen to the next issue, for which I will give my response. But I am a bit concerned about the way this kind of a charge has been made on the Union Government. The allegation is, and I read it, “Perhaps the most worrying development is the FM’s announcement that the Union Government has agreed to take the entire burden of the budget of police in J&K by spending Rs.12,000 crores. It further goes to say, “This was earlier being done by the Union Government as part of the security reimbursement expenditure. Why has that been repackaged from a reimbursement situation?” That is the question. Further, “Has the police salary liability been taken over by the Union Government in perpetuity is also a question.” To add to it, and this is the most interesting part, “Does it reflect the Government’s intention to rule the State from Delhi in perpetuity by retaining Home Affairs of J&K with the Union Government? Will the FM commit in the House that taking over police salary liability is not a Trojan horse?” I would like to respond to this.

The scheme on reimbursement of security-related expenditure continues even today. So it has not been discontinued. Had it been discontinued, you will have the suspicion. But when it has not been, why would you have the suspicion in the first place? Or, is it being not cared for, or if you want to put it in the side and still generate a conversation based on just your apprehensions, I am not sure if it is a responsible way to approach this issue. Second, I am saying this with a bit of a hesitation, but I want to say this. If at all there was a Trojan horse as regards J&K, it is Article 35A and Article 370, which were the real Trojan horse, because it was not even made as a part of the Constitution Amendment. It was just put in the Appendix, as though that is also part of the Constitution, but it was not duly brought as a Constitution Amendment. But, for those who are carrying that Constitution nowadays and showing it, they should explain to us whether that was not a deceit. And, is that not a Trojan horse to keep J&K not integrated with India? With that done, with that kind of a Trojan horse approach, you are asking us that whether we take the burden of J&K Police expenditure, so that the J&K Administration will have more money to do developmental activity and the Centre can take the salary of the J&K Police to insinuate that this is being done with an intention of perpetuity, I am sorry, this entire approach is making me wonder if this is being done deliberately so that there can be a kind of a atmosphere of doubt created about India, about India’s governance and about India’s federal structure. This approach, I am sorry to say, is not healthy. And, you just put it out to say this is how we perceive it. You have been

in governance for more than 70 years, not 70, but 50 or 40 years. I am sure you understand the significance of what is going on and the way in which that State is being restored back to be a part of India. We belong to a Party which firmly believed from the beginning, from 1947, “एक देश, एक निशान, एक विधान”, unlike the Congress Party.

Sir, I am afraid to say, separatists, who are self-proclaimed, are coming into the Congress Party with red carpets thrown for them to come in. They are the separatists, who were the ones, who caused permanent and perpetual problem there. Now, post-2019, we are, at least, being able to develop the State even as we are containing terrorism whereas now, like earlier, terrorists, self-proclaimed terrorists, are also being welcomed in the Congress Party, Sir. ...*(Interruptions)*...

SHRI RANDEEP SINGH SURJEWALA (Rajasthan): Sir, I would like to say something. ...*(Interruptions)*...

MR. CHAIRMAN: She is not yielding. ...*(Interruptions)*... Mr. Randeep Surjewala, she is not yielding. ...*(Interruptions)*... Please go ahead. ...*(Interruptions)*... Let us not make it a practice. ...*(Interruptions)*... This side also. ...*(Interruptions)*... Please go ahead, hon. Minister.

SHRIMATI NIRMALA SITHARAMAN: Threat to cooperative federalism is a topic on which there has been a lot of discussion and it was based only on the fact that the Budget speech mentioned only two States and it did not mention the others.

Yesterday, in the Lok Sabha too, I addressed this matter. I wanted to highlight the fact that total resources allocated to 'Transfer to the States' in BE 2024-25 is Rs. 22,91,182 crore, and, it is an increase of Rs. 4,93,645 crores over the last year. So, 'Transfer to the States' are going unhindered as per the recommendation of the Finance Commission and I will further elaborate on that when I come to some of the members who have raised question in particular on that topic. The threat to cooperative federalism issue has been raised by several hon. members, inclusive of former Finance Minister Shri P. Chidambaram, Shri Jawhar Sircar, Shri N.R. Elango, Shri Shanmugam, Shri C.Ve. Shanmugam and also Shri Mohamed Abdulla. So, there are many Members who have raised this. If the inference is that I have spoken about only two States and left the others out, monies are not even going to those States is the immediate propaganda after the Budget was presented in the House, which was taken up in a big way by the INDI Alliances. ...*(Interruptions)*... It can't be

INDIA alliance. It is INDI alliance. ...*(Interruptions)*... I.N.D.I. Alliance. ...*(Interruptions)*... What is the last 'A' for? How can it be INDIA alliance?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Chidambaram, not while sitting. ...*(Interruptions)*... Please. You are a very senior Member. Please maintain order. She is not yielding. ...*(Interruptions)*...

SHRIMATI NIRMALA SITHARAMAN: Sir, if only two States were named and others were not, I just want to highlight what happened in the earlier Budgets which were presented by Congress-led UPA. Sir, in the Interim Budget of 2009-10, only Bihar and Uttar Pradesh were mentioned. All right. They came back to power in 2009-10. Did they increase it? Yes, they increased it. To how many? To eight. Rest twenty States were not even mentioned. Are they clearly going to admit now that they did not send any money to 20 States because they didn't mention it in the speech? I went back to reading every one of them. 2004-05, only 11 States were mentioned, 17 were not; 10 were mentioned in the next one, 18 were not. So, like that, I can go on. Does that mean during their time, for those States, which they did not mention, they didn't send anything? No, even that was not true. They sent money to all States, but only chose to speak about some States.

That is true for them, but it can't be true for me, is it? Protest outside the Parliament saying other States are being ignored. What a deliberate attempt to mislead people! And I condemn that. I will just highlight this point on agriculture allocations. 'Agriculture allocation has come down', was the allegation, and also a statement was made. Several Members have spoken on that -- Randeep Surjewala *ji*, Raghav Chadha *ji*, Rajani Patil *ji*, Sanjay Yadav *ji* and Manoj Kumar Jha *ji*. I want to highlight that the Budget allocation in 2013-14 for agriculture and farmers welfare was only Rs. 21,934 crores, whereas in 2024-25, it has increased to Rs. 1.23 lakh crores, over 5.5 times in a decade. In P.M. Kisan, about which I will also mention a bit later, more than Rs. 3.24 lakh crores has been disbursed to over 11 crore farmers. Institutional credit, as a target for agriculture, has increased more than 2.5 times since 2014-15 from Rs. 8 lakh crores to Rs. 20 lakh crores. Interest subsidy, which is given to farmers through Kisan Credit Card, has increased 2.4 times since 2014-15, from Rs. 6,000 crores to Rs. 14,252 crores. KCC now covers animal husbandry and fisheries also. In case of small and marginal farmers, the number of accounts which are opened for them, and they avail agricultural loan, has grown from 57 per cent in 2014-15 to 76 per cent in 2023-24. Sir, Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana was launched in 2016 to provide crop insurance coverage to farmers and an amount of

more than Rs. 1.5 lakh crores has been disbursed till today to the farmers. Agri-Infra Fund was launched under Aatmanirbhar Bharat package to address existing infrastructure gaps and mobilize investments. More than Rs. 35,200 crores have been sanctioned for 48,000 projects under the Agri-Infra Fund. So, the money collected, although as a cess, much against the allegation which is levied on us, saying cess money you retain, it is getting spent, here in this case, for agriculture infrastructure creation. More than 23 crore soil health cards have been distributed to farmers which provide farmers with a nutrient status of their soil and its composition. Around 1.8 crore farmers and 2.53 lakh traders have been registered on the E-NAM portal, which is a national agriculture marketing place. In the last 10 years, more than Rs. 11 lakh crore have been spent to provide fertilizers to farmers at affordable prices. Government has also formulated agricultural export policy in 2018 in the country for the first time. This has led to agricultural exports reaching up to four lakh crores of rupees. A separate Department of Fisheries has been set up in 2019, assisting farmers with schemes worth more than Rs. 38,000 crores which have been implemented in the fisheries sector due to which fish production has increased from 95 lakh metric tons to 175 lakh metric tons, almost double in the last 10 years. Sir, this is where this insurance-related point, which I said earlier, I have to repeat. In its 2004 election manifesto, the Congress Party promised to implement a comprehensive crop insurance scheme.

4:00 P.M.

However, it was not till the NDA came to power under Prime Minister Modi that *Fasal Bima Yojana* was implemented. They could have done it during their time. But no, it waited for a manifesto. But that was the manifesto of 2004, and they had ten years after that. They did not do anything on that. The Congress said it would examine the feasibility of direct income support to farmers. However, it was not till 2019 when Prime Minister Modi gave *PM-Kisan Samman Nidhi*. They state things in their manifesto. It lies in their manifesto. But they don't implement that when they come to power. It is the failure of their flagship scheme which is the loan waiver scheme of 2008. I have mentioned this several times. I am not taking time of the august House. The loan waiver scheme was not even fully implemented. In fact, many farmers were not given certificate stating that they have cleared their dues and everything, so that after that they can go and procure loan from the banks. Because without the certificates, bank wouldn't give it. Thirty-eight per cent farmers hadn't been given the certificate, and they are sitting. *Loan waiver gaya; loan naheen mila abhi*. That is

the *halaat*, careless and laid back fashion with which a sensitive subject like loan waiver had been handled by the Congress Party.

Sir, on health and education, hon. Members Shri Sanjeev Arora, Shri Sujeet Kumar and Shrimati Sagarika Ghose had raised question saying that the National Health Policy of the NDA targeted only 2.5 per cent of the GDP on health sector. Total allocation under health increased from Rs.88,000 crore in 2023-24 to Rs.89,287 crore in 2024-25. Under the *Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana*, 15 new All India Institute of Medical Sciences have been approved. Out of that, nine projects have been completed starting from 2014. In ten years, nine new All India Institute of Medical Sciences have been completed while a total of 15 have been given sanction. Similarly, 17 Government medical colleges/institutes have been approved. Out of that, 10 projects have been completed. This is the attention given to health in different forms. This is what I want to place before you for the consideration of the House.

Sir, under *Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana*, 34.28 crore Ayushman Bharat Cards were issued and Rs.94,225 crore have been authorized for hospital admissions. So the out-of-pocket expense of patients is being brought down because of the various measures which have been taken.

Under Mission Indradhanush, cumulative total number of children vaccinated is 5.42 crores and cumulative total number of pregnant women vaccinated is 1.31 crore. Pradhan Mantri National Dialysis Programme has been implemented in 748 districts at 1,485 centres and it deploys 10,077 hemodialysis machines. A total of 23.33 lakh patients have availed of this facility of dialysis and 2.7 crore hemodialysis sessions have been held as of 30th April 2024. Sir, 10,000 PM Jan Aushadhi Kendras have been opened and they provide 30-80 per cent cheaper medicines and medical equipment are also being made available.

Sir, on unemployment, several hon. Members have spoken. They are: Randeep Singh Surjewala *ji*, Raghav Chadha *ji*, Sanjay Yadav *ji*, P. Chidambaram *ji*, Jawhar Sircar *ji*, Sujeet Kumar *ji* and Sagarika Ghose *ji*. First of all, I would like to present before you that our policy is to make youth competent, *saksham*. For that, we also have brought in this time a package of five schemes providing employment in three and one for skilling and one for internship.

We hope that with this package, together with 48 crore Mudra loans worth Rs. 29 lakh crore which have been disbursed, where we now want to increase the limit of Rs.10 lakh to Rs.20 lakh for tarun category, and all these put together, there will be a big difference in skilling, internship and job creation. But the UPA era jobless growth is something which we cannot forget. It hurt India's youth the most because RBI's KLEMS data showed that total employment declined from 47.2 crore in 2012-13

to 47 crore in 2013-14. And that remains to be the only period of decline recorded since 1981-82. So, when it declined there, to recover from there, even during the period, not much was done. Formal employment was also badly hit during UPA, especially in the formal manufacturing sector. The Annual Survey of Industries which is issued by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation showed a sharper percentage decline than ever seen during the worst of covid pandemic. So, even during covid pandemic, it was not the kind of decline as was seen during UPA's time. So, on employment, our facts, which are given by Periodic Labour Force Survey, PLFS, show that the labour market indicators for persons of age 15 years and above have steadily improved from 2017-18 to 2022-23. Labour force participation has also increased from 49.8 per cent in 2017-18 to 57.9 per cent in 2022-23. Women's labour force participation has risen to 37 per cent in 2022-23 from 23.3 per cent in 2017-18. The unemployment rate has declined from six per cent in 2017-18 to a low of 3.2 per cent in 2022-23. Youth unemployment, that is, the age between 15-29 years, has declined sharply from 17.8 per cent in 2017-18 to 10 per cent in 2022-23. ...(*Interruptions*)... This is the Annual Periodic Labour Force Survey report which has given this. Further to reinforce the fact, the SBI research report released in July, 2024, says that India created 12.5 crore jobs during 2014-2023 compared to 2.9 crore created between 2004 and 2014. So, the distinct increase in the jobs created during the ten years under Prime Minister Modi's leadership has to be highlighted. In the last decade, the employability of Indian youth has increased sharply, rising from less than 34 per cent in 2014 to over 51 per cent in 2024, and we will further improve it through the PM's package on employment and skilling.

Sir, now, I come to inflation. There has been a lot of discussion on that. I would like to give the data and also differentiate between the inflation which was present during UPA and our approach towards dealing with inflation now so that we can see how inflation has been handled both under UPA and NDA. We saw double digit high inflation period under UPA because policies were reckless and inappropriate policies were taken on the one hand, and inept measures were taken to control inflation on the other. Domestic inflation -- this is a very important statement -- used to be higher than the global average. That is very significant to be noticed. Post the global financial crisis of 2008, UPA Government took stimulus measures to boost the economy.

The problem arose and I am sorry I have to say this. When economists, who are repeatedly quoted to us saying "Reputed economists; you are not that.", when leaders of that stature did not know when and how to withdraw the stimulus -- the stimulus which was brought in after the global financial crisis -- it led to a high double

digit inflation between 2009 and 2013, high fiscal deficit as a result and debt, as a result, crowding out private investment. Between January, 2012 and April, 2014, retail inflation was more than 9 per cent in 22 out of the 28 months. So, let us understand the gravity of this inflation which we have noticed during that time. No supply side measures were effectively taken in those days. As a result, relief, even partial relief, was not available for the consumers. UPA inherited a very stable macroeconomic environment. Atalji, when his term was over in 2004, had left behind a very strong Indian economy. Inflation was only at 3.8 per cent from 1999 to 2000 and to 2003-04. Comparatively, average annual inflation rose to 8.1 per cent between 2004-05 and 2013-14. Where is 3.8 per cent and where is 8.1 per cent? That is their record on inflation handling - high fiscal deficit, decreased prioritization of Capital Expenditure. That contributed to sustained high inflation averaging double digits. Take for example, India's inflation averaged at 10.1 per cent January to April, 2013 compared to the average of 3.9 per cent across all the emerging markets. If emerging markets are countries where we can compare ourselves, they were only at 3.9 per cent where as you had UPA keeping our inflation at 10.1 per cent. Whereas to contrast this with our period over the last decade, India's average inflation was only 5.1 per cent lower than the 5.8 per cent average among the emerging economies. So, we are close to it and even lesser than the average of the emerging economies' inflation. That is the difference between UPA's handling of inflation and NDA's handling of inflation. Sir, Congress means *mehangai* is something the common man knows as well because the common man's slogan used to be and continues to be: "कांग्रेस आई, महंगाई लार्ई". ...*(Interruptions)*... This has been the parlance of the normal people. ...*(Interruptions)*... So, कांग्रेस मतलब महंगाई। ...*(Interruptions)*... Sir, I want to.....*(Interruptions)*...

विपक्ष के नेता (श्री मल्लिकार्जुन खरगे) : सर, ...*(व्यवधान)*... आपको क्या बोलना है, आपकी क्या अचीवमेंट है, आपका फिजिकल अचीवमेंट क्या है, आपका फाइनेंशियल अचीवमेंट क्या है, आपने कितनी प्रोग्रेस की है, इस पर बोलिए ...*(व्यवधान)*...

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay. ...*(Interruptions)*... Please. ...*(Interruptions)*... Hon. Finance Minister. ...*(Interruptions)*...

श्री मल्लिकार्जुन खरगे : जब बात खुद पर आई, तो कांग्रेस ने ऐसा किया ...*(व्यवधान)*....

MR. CHAIRMAN: Hon. Finance Minister, please. ...*(Interruptions)*... Hon. Leader of the Opposition. ...*(Interruptions)*... नहीं-नहीं, प्लीज़ ...*(व्यवधान)*... ...*(Interruptions)*... She is not yielding. ...*(Interruptions)*...

SHRIMATI NIRMALA SITHARAMAN: Okay, I yield. ...*(Interruptions)*...

MR. CHAIRMAN: Okay, she has yielded. ...*(Interruptions)*...Yes. ...*(Interruptions)*... रुकिए, रुकिए, I hope that there will be peace, calm and camaraderie in the House.

सभा के नेता (श्री जगत प्रकाश नड्डा) : माननीय सभापति जी, अभी एलओपी साहब ने जो विषय उठाया कि आप अपनी बात करिए और कांग्रेस के जमाने की बात न करिए, जब भी बजट पर चर्चा होती है, तो वह हमेशा comparative terms में होती है। ...*(व्यवधान)*... हमेशा हमको बताना पड़ता है ...*(व्यवधान)*...

MR. CHAIRMAN: Please. ...*(Interruptions)*... No. You had all the right to say so. ...*(Interruptions)*... You had all the right... ...*(Interruptions)*... Please. ...*(Interruptions)*...No, I do not appreciate it. ...*(Interruptions)*... Sorry, I don't appreciate. ...*(Interruptions)*... What is this? ...*(Interruptions)*... Forget about it. Nothing is going on record; why are you saying so?

श्री जगत प्रकाश नड्डा : राज्य सभा में आने वाले लोगों के बारे में भी कांग्रेस पार्टी को सोचना चाहिए कि इस हाउस में चर्चा की गरिमा और चर्चा को कैसे आगे बढ़ाना है। मैं यहाँ पर सिर्फ माननीय वित्त मंत्री, श्रीमती निर्मला सीतारमण जी जो बात कह रही थीं, उनके पक्ष में हाउस को यह बताना चाहता हूँ कि बजट relative और comparative terms में बताया जाता है। अगर हमें विकास बताना है, तो हमको बताना है कि हम कहाँ से चले और कहाँ पहुँचे। हमको यह भी बताना होता है कि हम किस गति से चले और हमको यह भी बताना पड़ता है कि हमने एक long leap ली है, एक लंबी छलांग ली है। जब हम यह लंबी छलांग लेने की बात करते हैं, तो हम अँधकार से उजाले की ओर जाते हैं। जब हम उसका पर्यायवाची ढूँढ़ेंगे, तो 2014 के पहले अँधकार दिखता है और 2014 के बाद उजाला दिखता है।...*(व्यवधान)*...

MR. CHAIRMAN: Hon. Minister, no...*(Interruptions)*... Nothing will go on record. ...*(Interruptions)*... Not, you. I am asking another Minister. Please take your seat. ...*(Interruptions)*... Only Finance Minister will address. Please. ...*(Interruptions)*...I cannot open the debate. The debate is over. No, Sir....*(Interruptions)*... Only the hon. Finance Minister will speak. We have to maintain some decorum in the House, and I am glad, we are improving a lot.

SHRIMATI NIRMALA SITHARAMAN: Thank you very much, Sir. I do take what the hon. Leader of Opposition suggested. What we do today is what I am highlighting and, therefore, also saying, something similar of this kind did not happen then. He may refute it, but it is a matter of fact and I am grateful for the intervention of the Leader of the House to state it in his nice Hindi which I cannot speak as well, to say what exactly it was, getting out of *andhakaar* to go into अच्छी रोशनी वाला and that is what is happening now.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Hon. Finance Minister, but your Hindi is not bad. Please go ahead.

SHRIMATI NIRMALA SITHARAMAN: Thank you, Sir. Sir, it is not just me who is talking about what had not happened then and it is not just me who is talking about what kind of things that happened then. I am saying what not happened then and what kind of things happened then based on eminent people and their words. Take for example, what one former Governor of Reserve Bank had to say. I am quoting, I am not taking his name. I do not know if it is permitted because I think people who are not Members of this House, we should not name and so on. So I will just say, 'the former Governor of Reserve Bank'. In his book, he says and I quote, "The Finance Ministry used to pressurize the RBI to soften the interest rates and present a rosier picture of the growth to shore up sentiments." You were not able to perform in the economy, managing the inflation, giving stimulus to growth and leading the country to have better growth, but you are asking the RBI to give a rosy picture so that the sentiments don't get affected because that sentiment and the kind of impact it was having on the economy, is where we went to being fragile five. And fragile five economy is a fact which is before then. But they could not act on it, instead they put pressure on Reserve Bank.

So, what you need to do constructively, you don't do; on the contrary, you do such things. And I am not saying it, but a reputed, respected, former bureaucrat who was also the Governor of the Reserve Bank has written it. So, I want to just highlight, Sir, what kind of efforts we have made to keep inflation under control. This is something which I want to say now, for Members who have been very keen to know what is happening today. I am telling you what is happening today. Please make a note of it. Sir, we implemented measures leading to a reduced average inflation of 4.5 per cent in 2014-15 to 2018-19, well within the RBI's target range of 2 to 6 per cent. Moreover, India's inflation between 2020 and 2023 was much lower than the global average. So, I want to highlight, why it was so, because competent and proactive measures were undertaken by the Government to control inflation. And, we

managed to contain inflation at 5.7 per cent from 2019-20 to 2023-24 despite challenges which were unforeseen, and the size and the magnitude of COVID was something which all over the world, even today, has tarnished the economies and they are not able to come out of it, whereas we have managed to be closer to the tolerance band given by RBI. Many countries faced three-to-four-decade-high double digit inflation after the COVID pandemic. So, I just want to list out the five-year terms and the inflation rates which have prevailed. These are numbers which are already in public domain. But it is useful for us to compare so that we know what our policy induced internal factors is which drove UPA's inflation, as different from NDA's inflation, which is largely driven by a pandemic and because of the global disruptions. So, the difference between the inflation then and the inflation now, are very clearly before us. NDA's period, five years between 1999 and 2004, the retail inflation was only 3.8 per cent. UPA-I, five years, it was 6 percent; UPA-II, 10.2 per cent. So, if you were to take 10 years of UPA-I and UPA-II, it was 8.1 per cent. NDA-I, between 2014 and 2019, 4.5 per cent and NDA-II, 5.7 per cent. NDA-I and II put together, in 10 years, 5.1 percent inflation. Where is 5.1 and where is 8.1, of the 10 years then and 10 years now? So, we need to understand that even when very important steps were taken like cutting down on the excise duty of petrol and diesel by the hon. Prime Minister twice, once in November and once in June of 2023, November of 2022. Every State tried to reduce. But for political scoring of a point, Congress-ruled States did not even then and now, and the inflation in those States, even if the change of the Government has happened, continues to be higher, and efforts to contain them are being taken now also. They just didn't want to cut down. On the contrary, if I remember correctly, -- our party president and the Leader of the House here, is from Himachal Pradesh -- the first thing the Government did there, after being elected, was to increase the price of petrol and diesel. Now, the cry for inflation in this House, questions on what action you are taking to contain inflation. Congress Government in Himachal Pradesh, a small State, increases the price. And, here, the lecture is about contain the prices and bring it down! Congress can do that. Was it in Karnataka! So, on inflation and containment measures, there may be questions on us and we are willing to answer. But, what about those States which are being governed by Congress? The steps that we have taken to control inflation, the strategic policies for targeting inflation have been taken. PM Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana is to make sure that the bottom most layer poorest people get their grains, at least, so that they can have some kind of an assurance that they have something to feed their family with.

The Government continuously offloads wheat and rice from the central pool under the Open Market Sale Scheme (OMSS) to increase availability in the market.

These are the steps that we are taking. To prevent hoarding and unscrupulous speculations, traders and wholesalers, big chain retailers and processors were required to disclose their stock positions of wheat and rice. We follow them; we pursue with them and then ensure that stocks are coming into the market.

Under the price stabilisation funds, Sir, a dynamic buffer stock of pulses is maintained and calibrated release of stocks contain the price and we keep procuring to increase the buffer stock. The basic duty on crude palm oil, crude soyabean oil and crude sunflower oil was cut from 2.5 per cent to nil so that edible crude oil can come into India and that can be refined creating jobs at the same time making edible oil available in the country. The agri-cess on oils was reduced from 20 per cent to 5 per cent. So, we are reducing the revenues that we are earning, but making sure that people get affordable price on commodities which are important. This duty structure has been extended from January 15th, 2024 to 31st March, 2025 so that the edible oils can be distributed with affordable prices.

We have also taken measures to make sure basic items like atta, rice, chana dal and moong dal are distributed as brand Bharat Atta, Bharat Rice and Bharat Chana Dal and Moong Dal so that they can be sold at affordable prices. Sir, per kg cost of atta is Rs. 27.50, per kg cost of rice is Rs. 27.50, per kg cost of chana dal is Rs. 60 and per kg cost of moong dal is Rs. 107 and Rs. 93 for sabut moong dal. These are been sold; 14.7 lakh tonnes of atta, 13.98 lakh tonnes of rice, 11.52 lakh tonnes of chana dal and 2984.37 tonnes of moong dal, both put together, *sabut* and *dhula*, are sold. It means people are benefitting from the wholesale distribution under the brand 'Bharat'. Therefore, Sir, I want to make sure that the efforts taken by the Government to contain inflation are informed to the hon. Members and they know that we are taking the necessary steps.

Sir, quickly on *POSHAN Abhiyan* and *Saksham Anganwadi*, the question about which Sujeet Kumarji from BJD had asked. The allocation for *POSHAN* and *Saksham Anganwadi*'s have only increased and not come down. It was Rs. 20,554 crores in 2023-24 to Rs.21,200 crores in 2024-25.

One RJD MP Shri Sanjay Yadav asked about the per capita income. Sir, per capita income at constant prices grew at an average rate of four per cent during 2012-13 to 2013-14. Subsequent to those two years, except in 2019-20 and 2020-21 which were the pandemic years, the growth in per capita income at constant prices was higher than 2012-13 and 2013-14. I can just read it out at constant prices. In 2012-13, it was 3.3 per cent, in 2013-14, it was 4.6 per cent and so on except when in 2020-21, it was minus 8.9; it has recovered to be 5.7 per cent now. So, per capita income issue is also something which I wanted to address.

Sir, this is a very important issue which has been raised that arbitrarily we have been cutting the borrowing ceilings of non-BJP states. Sir, I want to completely dispel this baseless argument. The Central Government follows the recommendation of the Fifteenth Finance Commission for issuing borrowing consent, financial year-wise, uniformly, to all States. Net borrowing ceilings of 3 per cent GSDP have been fixed for the financial year 2024-25. Borrowing consent is issued to all States by adopting uniform parameters as per borrowing guidelines. There is no difference here. All of them are treated the same. Moreover, the Fifteenth Finance Commission has also recommended performance-based additional borrowing space of 0.5 per cent of GSDP. This is linked to the performance in power sector reforms. I would like to present before you the list of States which have fulfilled the requisite criteria related to power sector reforms and availed additional borrowing space of 0.5 per cent of GSDP.

Sir, I will give example of 2021-22, 2022-23 and 2023-24. For example, West Bengal got Rs. 6,911 crores for 2021-22. These are additional borrowing — over and above 3 per cent given unconditionally. Sir, it was Rs. 8,352 crores for 2022-23.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Is it in crores? Are these figures in crores?

SHRIMATI NIRMALA SITHARAMAN: It is in crores. Thank you, Sir. And, Rs. 7,276 crores for 2023-24. This is relating to West Bengal.

I come to Tamil Nadu. Sir, for 2021-22, it is Rs. 7,054 crores; Rs. 5,775 crores in 2022-23 and Rs. 9,656 crores in 2023-24 are additional borrowings allowed each year, because of power sector reforms. This is about Tamil Nadu. I come to Kerala now. It is Rs. 4,060 crores for 2021-22; Rs. 4,263 crores for 2022-23 and Rs. 4,866 crores in 2023-24. These are additional borrowing permission, and they have availed these amounts are on record. The Government in Himachal Pradesh is formed just now. So, I cannot give the figures straightaway. Sir, Rs. 251 crores was allowed in 2021-22. But, we have not had any claim after that. I can read that for other States as well. So, there is no arbitrariness here.

I come to the issue relating to Kerala. I cannot find hon. Member, Dr. John Brittas, because he did raise this issue in between when I was speaking. He is not here. But, never mind, I will reply to that. Hon. Supreme Court has also mentioned to the State to resolve the matter amicably with the Centre. It implicitly supported the stand of the Centre. It did not say that the Centre is wrong. ...*(Interruptions)*...

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Madam, he has come.

SHRIMATI NIRMALA SITHARAMAN: Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Take your seat, Dr. John Brittas.

DR. JOHN BRITTAS (Kerala): Sir, I am here. ...*(Interruptions)*...

MR. CHAIRMAN: You are here; but not to interrupt. ...*(Interruptions)*... You listen. ...*(Interruptions)*... Sit down. ...*(Interruptions)*...

DR. JOHN BRITTAS: Sir, since hon. Minister referred my name, it is my right to reply. ...*(Interruptions)*...

MR. CHAIRMAN: No. Your name was referred because you were absent. Now that you are present, you will follow the decorous conduct, please. ...*(Interruptions)*...

DR. JOHN BRITTAS: Sir, the point is... ...*(Interruptions)*...

MR. CHAIRMAN: No, no. It is not done. You are an experienced Member. Please sit down. Hon. Minister, a word of suggestion. Next time, be careful while naming Dr. John Brittas, because if you name him, he claims a right.

SHRIMATI NIRMALA SITHARAMAN: Oh! Right, Sir.

DR. JOHN BRITTAS: Hon. Minister has already named, Sir. I have a right.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, I don't want to name anyone.

SHRIMATI NIRMALA SITHARAMAN: So, on the Kerala issue, hon. Supreme Court has, actually, mentioned that the State should amicably settle the matter as regards borrowing. The Supreme Court did not imply that there is a wrong doing or *mala fide*. If I can infer it, Sir, it implicitly supported the stand of the Centre. I will quote just one small paragraph. It said, "The Plaintiff State - Kerala - has failed to establish the three prongs of proving *prima facie* case - balance of convenience and irreparable injury. The State of Kerala is not entitled to the interim injunction, as prayed."

So, the subject of Article 293, whether the Centre should do it, should take an oversight mechanism, all this may... ...*(Interruptions)*...

MR. CHAIRMAN: No; no. Please maintain decorum. ...*(Interruptions)*... Please take your seat. ...*(Interruptions)*... Hon. Finance Minister, please continue. ...*(Interruptions)*... Dr. John Brittas, don't make it a habit. ...*(Interruptions)*...

SHRIMATI NIRMALA SITHARAMAN: Sir, I want to just pick on the words he uttered. I wanted to refer to Hon. Member, Dr. John Brittas, because he was not here. You are gracious enough to say, "Oh! He has come, you talk about it." Then, there is a little banter. I don't know whether he gets a right to it. I have not mentioned anything about him till now. But, he would, in the interest of his State, want to speak something. But to imply that I am picking and choosing to my convenience is because he has not heard what I said earlier, or, not even was here to hear what additional borrowing over and above the three per cent, which is given unconditionally, has been given to Kerala over the three years. He was not even here to hear it. And, then, it is not fair to say, "she is picking and choosing". No, I have given a comprehensive picture of what the additional borrowing is, which is a conditional borrowing. Earlier, the three per cent was completely given was all said. But, unfortunately, hon. Member, Dr. John Brittas, was not here. Now, he says that I am picking and choosing. I have given the whole story and I am picking and choosing one line, which is important for establishing Centre's credibility. ...*(Interruptions)*...

MR. CHAIRMAN: One minute, hon. Finance Minister. What I find is Dr. John Brittas makes impact when he is absent; he makes impact when he is present. Hon. Finance Minister, please continue. ...*(Interruptions)*... No; no. It is never done; you know it more than I do. ...*(Interruptions)*... Please go ahead, hon. Finance Minister. ...*(Interruptions)*... I can't restart the debate. ...*(Interruptions)*... Okay! Normally when I ask the speaker to look at me, I think, it is best to have eye contact also. ...*(Interruptions)*... Please go ahead, hon. Finance Minister. ...*(Interruptions)*...

SHRIMATI NIRMALA SITHARAMAN: I am following the rules, Sir. ...*(Interruptions)*...

MR. CHAIRMAN: The Leader of the Opposition has appreciated you. ...*(Interruptions)*...

SHRIMATI NIRMALA SITHARAMAN: Thank you, Sir. Based on the constitutional provisions, the Government of India adopts a rule-based system. This ensures

fairness to all States. And, no deviation is entertained because of presumed entitlements or presumed prejudices that may prevail. No, we follow as per the Finance Commission's recommendations.

Sir, related somewhat to this was the question on tax devolution to States, that it is less than what is recommended by the Finance Commission, a point that Shri N.R. Elango from DMK had raised. He is present here. We also have senior Member, Shri Tiruchi Siva. I want to take a minute on this point. We have heard Members raising this voice that Centre does not actually devolve 42 per cent or the 41 per cent, post J&K becoming a Union Territory. I want to clarify on this point. The Finance Commission recommends devolution of taxes as a percentage of net proceeds, as defined in Article 279 of the Constitution. 'Net proceeds' is calculated after deducting cesses, surcharges, and cost of collection from the Gross Tax Receipts (GTR). So, the first matter is the Gross Tax Receipts. From there, you remove cesses, surcharges, and the cost of collection. And, then, you arrive at net proceeds. And, it is from the net proceeds the devolution of 41 per cent or 42 per cent is. It is wrong to calculate devolution, based on Gross Tax Receipts and, then, claim that the Centre is devolving less to the States than what is suggested by the Finance Commission because the mandated amount, which is 41 per cent, is based on net proceeds, and not the Gross Tax Receipts. So, it should be noted, the devolution is not the percentage of GTR, but it is a percentage of the net proceeds.

So, it should be noted that devolution is not the percentage of GTR but it is a percentage of the net proceeds. The Centre has always given the percentage from the net proceeds without fail to the States. And, who arrives at the net proceeds? Does the Centre decide the amount? No. The net proceeds are certified by the CAG. It is that amount, which the CAG gives you. The CAG gives that that net proceeds is this much, and, on this, you will devolve 41 per cent to the States. So, I cannot choose saying net proceeds is only this much and not another; that is done by the CAG. Every year, it does. It is not as if it is done one year. Net proceeds is decided by the CAG every year. I also want to highlight this point because I want to elaborate on that for one minute. This is decided by the CAG every year. If there are any dues pending to the States, it is also immediately released.

(MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN *in the Chair.*)

Now, having said that, I want to highlight and draw your attention to this fact, Mr. Deputy Chairman, Sir. I want to inform the Members that our Government has devolved Rs.82,000 crores as a part of the tax devolution after obtaining the CAG's

certificate in March 2022. So, what is special about it? I am claiming that every year, I am giving it in time. So, why am I mentioning only this Rs.82,000 crores? Sir, from 1996-97 to 2014 when Prime Minister Modi comes in, between 1996 and 2014, there was an accumulated due of Rs.82,000 crores on tax devolution; this was not devolved, and no Government in between had taken a call on it. We cleared it after the CAG gave the certificate in March, 2022-23. Rs.82,000 crores had been pending since 1996. ...*(Interruptions)*... No; you are not giving me 42 per cent; you go on a wrong calculation, not on net proceeds but on GTR, and also not recognize the fact that 1996 से जो पेंडिंग है, उसको भी हम 2022 में क्लियर कर रहे हैं। मोदी जी, स्टेट्स को अलग तरीके से डील नहीं करते हैं, क्योंकि वे भी चीफ मिनिस्टर रहे हैं और उन्हें स्टेट्स की दिक्कत मालूम है। हम हर पैसा समय पर दे रहे हैं। 82 हजार करोड़ रुपये, जो 1996 से पेंडिंग था, उसको भी हमने ही क्लियर किया है।

Sir, I am almost, at the end. The former Finance Minister, probably, in the concluding stage of his speech, -- I was also here hearing him -- had said, "I have got five questions for which I want the Finance Minister to answer." Those five questions pertained to minimum wages, legal guarantee, education loan waiver, abolition of Agniveer and scrapping of NEET. I just want to give a very quick response to each one of these points. Minimum wages of Rs.400/- a day - I am referring to the hon. former Finance Minister who had raised five questions and wanted us to answer.

(MR. CHAIRMAN *in the Chair.*)

MR. CHAIRMAN: The best that has happened is, the hon. Finance Minister has not taken the ... *... (Interruptions) ...*

श्री राम दास अठावले (महाराष्ट्र): सर, एक मिनट। ...*(व्यवधान)*...

MR. CHAIRMAN: No, no; the hon. Minister is also a poet, but not on this occasion. ...*(Interruptions)*...

SHRIMATI NIRMALA SITHARAMAN: Sir, can I?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Yes; that was not to you; there is another hon. Minister behind you. My problem is, I will have to find some mechanism where when there are two hon. Ministers and the second one rises, then, when I tell one, the other one misunderstands it. ...*(Interruptions)*... Hon. Minister, please. ...*(Interruptions)*...

SHRIMATI NIRMALA SITHARAMAN: Yes, Sir, I am just responding. ...*(Interruptions)*...

MR. CHAIRMAN: Well, I am not addressing the hon. Finance Minister. ...*(Interruptions)*... Mr. Athawale, please. ...*(Interruptions)*... चलो, कम से कम आपने ऐसी चर्चा तो की, जो थोड़ी-सी हंसी मजाक की हुई। Otherwise, you are very serious when you make an observation. ...*(Interruptions)*... Please, hon. Minister. ...*(Interruptions)*... No, I will not allow. ...*(Interruptions)*... If I had to allow, I would have allowed the Leader of Opposition. I will not allow anyone.

SHRIMATI NIRMALA SITHARAMAN: Sir, he had raised five questions on which he said, why can't 400 rupees be declared as the minimum wages per day. Sir, I think he is talking about MNREGA Act, and, through which, to declare a minimum wage of Rs. 400. I just want to highlight the MNREGA Act of 2005 on that presumption. Section 6(1) of the Act says, 'Notwithstanding anything contained in the Minimum Wages Act 1948, the Central Government may, by notification, specify the wage rate for the purposes of the Act.' It says that. And it further says in the proviso, 'Provided that different rates of wages may be specified for different areas.' I also think probably because it was mentioned in the Congress Manifesto. I am a bit hazy on it, but his demand was when it is 400 rupees per day minimum wage, why we do not want to declare it. So I want to highlight, Sir, that the Rural Development Ministry which deals with MNREGA since UPA time has been declaring the minimum wage, and these are decided based on changes in the CPI-AL, that is, Consumer Price Index Agricultural Labour, which reflects inflation in rural areas. It is based on that, that every year, some kind of a notification comes. This has been the practice since 2005 to 2014. Our Government has also followed the same principle. I don't know if I can use this saying in the English language. 'What is sauce for goose is the sauce for gander as well.' One is therefore tempted, Sir, to ask the former FM, what prevented the UPA from notifying a uniform wage rate under the MNREGA when it was in power? They didn't do it then. But now if he is quoting the MNREGA Act and demanding that Government of India declare 400 rupees as minimum wage, I would want to also highlight, and I am sure being a legal mind he would be aware of this nuance, that the Minimum Wages Act of 1948 also empowers the States to fix minimum wages with respect to categories, various categories of employment, unskilled employment, and so on. So, in the States, minimum wages are again fixed differently for different States. So, minimum wages are fixed by States for different kinds of employment, just as Government of India also fixes minimum wages for railways or the mines or many

other things which come under its subject. For example -- I am taking the example of Karnataka — the State Government notifies four different zones to fix minimum wages for unskilled workers. Zone one is for Bengaluru city and the City Corporation area. Zone two is for district headquarters and there are various districts, and so on.

I would like to draw your attention that in the State of Himachal Pradesh, as per the latest notification, latest in this subject, which was issued in May, 2023, which was issued by the State Government, unskilled wage earners will get Rs.375 minimum wage.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Just a minute. I must appreciate your fairness. You touch the State of the Leader of the Opposition and next you are touching the State of the Leader of the House. So, that even balancing has taken place and I am privileged to be Chairman at a time when this House has presidents of the two leading parties in the country, the largest democracy.

SHRIMATI NIRMALA SITHARAMAN: So, if wages are to be fixed by different States at different levels and, even within a State, for different zones, it is difficult to think of how the Central Government can fix a wage of Rs.400 and also say, therefore, you know, it should be done for the entire country. Also, it might have been a slip of the tongue. I don't want to pick on it, but I am very tempted. In his speech, I think, he claimed that he travels 500,000 kilometers by road every month.

MR. CHAIRMAN: We can overlook it. This does happen sometimes. I tell you. The Leader of the House made a mention of seven crore and he quickly corrected that it was seven lakhs. So, we can ignore it.

SHRIMATI NIRMALA SITHARAMAN: So, education loans, he had a question to ask on education loans. So, we have already announced measures for education loans in this Budget for helping our youth who have not been eligible for any benefit under Government schemes or policies. We have announced a financial support of Rs.10 lakh for higher education within the country. E-vouchers for this purpose will be given directly to one lakh students every year for an annual interest subvention of 3 per cent of the loan amounts. He also asked a question about Agniveer Scheme. I wanted to highlight that the former Finance Minister has also served as the Home Minister. I am sure he understands the nuance involved in national security. Agniveer is a very reformative step to enhance the capabilities and battle readiness of our Armed Forces. It ensures actually that we have fit soldiers who are on the front line. So, one

of the expected outcomes of the Scheme is that Armed Forces will have much younger force by recruiting those in the age group of 17.5 years to 21 years and retaining only 25 per cent, thus reducing the average age of the Indian soldier. Why should we do it? In countries like the US and the UK, soldiers are required to render only two of six years in service because they want to keep the young, fit and agile person at the borders. I hope on matters related to the fitness and battle readiness of the Indian Army or the Armed Forces, we don't do politics because it is something which is going to be critical for this country. We need young, fit and battle-ready young people who are going to be trained. In fact, I was going to bring in here one of the news items which had come in the recent last two days about how in terms of fitness and in terms of skills acquired, which are so required at the borders, Agniveer people have come out with flying colours. Studies have proved it. So, this is a scheme which is very important, and we need to have greater sense of looking at the national interest, rather than just take policies on some other consideration.

Sir, I would like to remind that in 2014, the hon. Prime Minister Modi reviewed the situation. I got into Defence only later, in 2017, and, therefore, with some interest, I went back to look at the earlier periods also. In 2014, the Indian Armed Forces, particularly the Army, did not even have the bulletproof vests. We had to panic-buy and give them. And in that, there was the role of Manohar Parikarji and Arun Jaitleyji, to make quick procurements, and we had to procure it from elsewhere. But today, in our country, we produce bulletproof vests, which are good enough for our Army, and they feel that it has given them the sense of security. Not just the bulletproof vests, it is also a truth that in India, at that time, for 10 years, major defence procurements did not happen. And, this is not a fiction that I am telling you. In the House, the Defence Minister then had said, "We cannot procure it because we don't have the money." So, Agniveer is a scheme which we brought in with a great sense of commitment to keep our Armed Forces battle ready and to see that young and fit people get into the Army. I do not think there is a need for us to unnecessarily worry that this is causing some kind of a distortion; not at all. It is with the acceptance of the Armed Forces that it has been brought in. ...*(Interruptions)*... I think I have addressed the four issues that he had raised. The fifth one is about NEET. The hon. former Minister is a lawyer. Probably, he spoke one day before the final judgment came from the Supreme Court on the NEET exam, and, therefore, the verdict which was given by the Supreme Court, he probably would not have been aware. The Supreme Court did not scrap the NEET exam. It observed that there is no material at the present stage to indicate any systemic leak. That is about the NEET exam leakages. But, abolition of NEET, I am afraid to say, was triggered even

before the leak issue came up. So, I want to highlight some of the features. When was the NEET exam notified? For the benefit of all our hon. Members, I would like to inform that NEET was notified in December 2010, with its implementation. Who was leading the implementation at that time? It was led by the then DMK Minister Gandhiselvan, who served as the MoS for Health and Family Welfare, as part of the Congress-led UPA-II Government. So, it was brought at that time. ...*(Interruptions)*... The Supreme Court, while talking about the NEET, didn't take care of it. ...*(Interruptions)*... Thank you, Mr. Wilson. ...*(Interruptions)*... And, that is why it is running even now with a stay. ...*(Interruptions)*... Sir, I want him to not interrupt me and misunderstand. This is not done. In 2012, the UPA-2.0 introduced NEET Undergraduate Examination for medical admissions. And in 2013, the first exam took place. All this happened during the UPA. In 2013, the exam took place. When the Gazette notification of 20th December, 2010, was challenged in the Supreme Court, both the lawyers of the Medical Council of India and UPA's Additional Solicitor General of India defended NEET. December '20 was the time when Gazette notification was issued, and that Gazette was challenged in the Supreme Court. At that time, both the lawyers of the Medical Council of India and the ASG of the UPA Government defended NEET, saying this was an effort to streamline the admission process. ...*(Interruptions)*... Sir, the ASG then stated that the earlier system of multiple examinations was neither in the national interest, nor in the interest of maintaining the standards of medical education, nor did it serve the interest of the poor middle-class students who had to buy and fill forms of several examinations and travel across the country to appear in the examinations.

5:00 P.M.

They had to take multiple examinations. NEET does not cause disadvantage to anyone. Sir, NEET does not cause disadvantage to anyone. It expands opportunities. Tamil Nadu students secure 85 per cent of the seats with 69 per cent reservation, which is upheld in Tamil Nadu. With that reservation intact and with this process of NEET, with 85 per cent of the seats within Tamil Nadu and 15 per cent of all seats from all States put together, they can go for the 15 per cent seats to any State that they want. So, Tamil students benefit from all-India quota in other States also. The former Finance Minister talked about NEET. I also want to underline this fact that in 2011, when the DMK rule concluded, Tamil Nadu had just 1,945 medical seats. Presently, there are 10,425 medical seats, a remarkable surge of 8,480 seats in the past 11 years.

Sir, NEET has ensured cost-effective medical education for families. Certainly, it has hurt some vested interests, particularly those in the medical education field because, no longer, selling of medical seats is possible. And, therefore, it has hurt a lot of people. That is why, a particular lobby was actively against NEET even before this NEET leak issue has come up. Sir, in the year 2022-23, 12,997 Tamil Nadu Government school students wrote the NEET exam, and, of them 3,982 students passed it. It is noteworthy that the pass percentage has increased from 27 per cent in the last year to 31 per cent. So, I want to say, before NEET came in, only a few students from few schools in selected regions of Tamil Nadu could get medical seats. Now, it is across the board. I don't know if you will permit me, I want to mention names of a few Government school students from Tamil Nadu, belonging to very humble backgrounds and rural areas, who have passed the NEET examination over the last few years. Please allow me to mention the names.

Young girl, Kanimozhi from Needur, Mayiladuthurai got in 2023. She is the daughter of a labourer, *kuli thozhilali*, who is a temporary taxi driver. He also works as a temporary taxi driver. Annapoorani from a place called Singampunari, Sivaganga District, the District from where our former Finance Minister hails. That girl has also managed to get in. She is the daughter of a construction worker. It was again in 2023. Next is Arivunithi. Viralimalai is the place from where he qualified. It is in Pudukkottai District. He is son of a labourer, who is also a *kooli thozhilali*. He also got in 2023. Divyabarathi got in from a place called Thalavadi in Erode District. She is daughter of a labourer, again, a *kooli thozhilali*. Again, it was in 2023. Next is Kaviarasan from Karambakkudi in Pudukkottai District. He is the son of a farm labourer. Jeevith Kumar from Periyakulam, Theni, and, he is the son of a goat rearer, shepherd. He got in 2020. Next is Kavipriya from Cheyyar. Daughter of a farmer, she got in 2022. Santhanam from Dharmapuri. Son of a farm labourer, he got in 2022. Ramya from Karamadai in Coimbatore. She is a Scheduled Tribe. A particular tribe which is very disadvantaged in Tamil Nadu is called Irular. She is an Irular candidate and daughter of a labourer. ...*(Interruptions)*... Yes, it is on the Budget. Because the former Finance Minister asked about it, I am duty bound to answer it.

I may get the name wrong of the last candidate who I want to name here. She is from Karamadai, Coimbatore. Pirusica, I may be wrong with the name. She is the daughter of a tailor. Now, are these not success stories of NEET? Are these not students from rural areas? Are these not students who belong to the lowest strata? Construction workers, coolie workers, farmers, taxi drivers, their children are coming through NEET.

SHRI G.K. VASAN:*

MR. CHAIRMAN: Nothing will go on record, Mr. Vasan. You are a very senior Member. ...*(Interruptions)*... No, nothing will go on record. ...*(Interruptions)*...

SHRIMATI NIRMALA SITHARAMAN: Sir, I come to the last point and I will conclude. ...*(Interruptions)*...

SHRI TIRUCHI SIVA:*

SHRI N.R. ELANGO:*

MR. CHAIRMAN: Please, please. ...*(Interruptions)*... Please take your seat. ...*(Interruptions)*... Nothing is going on record. ...*(Interruptions)*... Hon. Members, I am extremely indulgent when you speak. But when Finance Minister speaks, ...*(Interruptions)*... No, she is not yielding. ...*(Interruptions)*... No, no; please take your seat. ...*(Interruptions)*... Mr. Tiruchi Siva has done the right thing. Please take your seat.

SHRIMATI NIRMALA SITHARAMAN: Sir, the debate has happened. All Members have spoken. Whoever was allowed by the Chair, spoke. Five questions were asked specifically by the former Finance Minister. I am giving him answers. I wish, with your support, all Members can, at least, listen to the answers that I want to give.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Please, Madam.

SHRIMATI NIRMALA SITHARAMAN: Sir, the last point. The former Finance Minister asked a couple of questions. Again, most Members are saying: What has this got to do with the Budget? Why do you want to answer on this? Why do you want to answer on that? But these were the questions raised. I don't know if they are related to Budget, but because these were raised during the Budget debate, I am answering. Questions were raised, and I am quoting the former Finance Minister from the YouTube. I quote, "I ask: Why does the UPSC have to play a role in the appointment of the DGP of a State? Why should a State Government not appoint the Vice-Chancellor of State Universities?" Of course, people can say why you are answering

* Not recorded.

these questions; these are not on Budget. But because he was asking, I am answering them here. Sir, I am indeed appalled that a very respected senior advocate, I am not an advocate, but with due respect...

MR. CHAIRMAN: All senior advocates are respectable.

SHRIMATI NIRMALA SITHARAMAN: Yes, Sir. So, he has raised a question saying ...

MR. CHAIRMAN: And you may not be aware, hon. Finance Minister, I am a senior advocate under suspension. ...*(Interruptions)*... No, no; Mr. Praful Patel, I am a senior advocate, and Mr. Bhupendra Yadav knows, under suspension, because if you hold an office like this, your *sanad* is suspended during that period. So, I suffered, I would tell the Leader of the Opposition, two things in 2019. When President issued warrant -- imagine warrant to a senior advocate -- appointing me as Governor, this lead to suspension of my *sanad* also. So, you have respect, I am sure, for all senior advocates, whether under suspension like me, and not otherwise. Please, go ahead. ...*(Interruptions)*...

DR. JOHN BRITTAS: This is the reason you suspended us! ...*(Interruptions)*...

SHRIMATI NIRMALA SITHARAMAN: Sir, I am actually appalled because...

MR. CHAIRMAN: But the hon. former Finance Minister had raised two very valid questions. One, why should, in the appointment of DGP, the UPSC come into picture? And the same he said about Vice-Chancellors. You say that you want to respond.

SHRIMATI NIRMALA SITHARAMAN: I would want to respond, Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Please go ahead.

SHRIMATI NIRMALA SITHARAMAN: Sir, hon. former Finance Minister has used this platform of vibrant democracy. I think he has misrepresented the situation to an extent that it goes to contradict the judicial verdict of the Supreme Court itself. On both counts, the guidelines, which have emanated from the hon. Supreme Court, are very clear. On this issue of appointment of DGP, as to why the UPSC has to play a

role, I just want to highlight that it was in this case of Prakash Singh and Others versus the Union of India, 2006.

This case was decided by the Supreme Court on 22nd September 2006 and it directed in the following words. "The Director General of Police of the State shall be selected by the State Government from amongst the three senior-most officers of the Department who have been empanelled for promotion to that rank by the Union Public Service Commission." The State fixes up on three candidates and sends the panel. It is the UPSC which decides that. This is the verdict of the Supreme Court in Police reform related case in which policeman Prakash Singh and others have gone to the Supreme Court. And in that, it clearly says that it is the UPSC. This is one.

SHRI RANDEEP SINGH SURJEWALA: Sir, I have a point of order.

MR. CHAIRMAN: What is your point of order? Come to the point of order. Don't make a speech.

SHRI RANDEEP SINGH SURJEWALA: Sir, if the Supreme Court decided that yardstick is the criterion, why has the Government not followed it in the case of Election Commission of India when there was a clear-cut directive?

MR. CHAIRMAN: Everything you say Mr. Randeep Singh Surjewala is irrelevant. Everyone is aware of the judgment. ...*(Interruptions)*... No; not like this. He had to speak. ...*(Interruptions)*... Look here, I take it as a very serious situation. Has the former Finance Minister while asserting, 'Why are you having role of UPSC in the appointment of DGP' misrepresented the situation? According to the present Finance Minister, the former Finance Minister totally misrepresented it. But there is a categorical judgment of the Supreme Court in the case of Prakash Singh and the directive is categorical. The State Government will select the DGP only out of a panel that is approved by the UPSC. This is a settled issue. Everyone knows about it. I am sure as and when former Finance Minister will be there...*(Interruptions)*... I take a very serious view of it. ...*(Interruptions)*... No. ...*(Interruptions)*... Hon. Members, I take a very serious view of it, because I have indicated that this House cannot be used to emanate information by way of misrepresentation, particularly a Supreme Court judgment which is known to one and all by and large and that too by a senior advocate. I take note of it. You kindly put the judgment on the Table of the House. ...*(Interruptions)*... Nothing is going on record, Digvijaya Singh ji. ...*(Interruptions)*... She is not yielding.

श्री दिग्विजय सिंह: महोदय, माननीय चिदम्बरम जी भी काफी प्रतिष्ठित वकील हैं। वे होम मिनिस्टर भी रह चुके हैं। तो जब वे यहाँ पर उपस्थित रहें, क्या आप उन्हें अपना स्पष्टीकरण देने का मौका देंगे?

श्री सभापति: बिल्कुल ठीक है। माननीय सदस्यगण, दिग्विजय सिंह जी ने बहुत महत्वपूर्ण बात कही है। यह एक charge है कि पूर्व वित्त मंत्री ने सदन के समक्ष महत्वपूर्ण तरीके से यह कहा है कि DGP बनाने का अधिकार राज्य सरकारों का ही है और आप Union Public Service Commission को क्यों बीच में ला रहे हैं? उनका direction साफ है कि you are doing this because you want to control States. Imputation यही है। The present Finance Minister says that this is being done not by any executive order. This is emanating from a judgment of the Supreme Court that was imparted in 2006 and the judgment is categorical. I am sure every lawyer knows it that appointment can take place only out of a panel approved by the UPSC.

I agree to your suggestion, and we will put it to former Finance Minister in what circumstances, while being Senior Advocate, he could misrepresent the situation so gravely to misinform the nation at large. We will put it to him. I agree to your suggestion.

SHRIMATI NIRMALA SITHARAMAN: Sir, just to be sure, I want to re-read the verdict of the court. On 22nd September, 2006, the Supreme Court directs thus, and I quote, "The Director-General of Police of the State shall be selected by the State Government from amongst the three senior-most officers of the Department who have been empanelled for promotion to that rank by the Union Public Service Commission." Sir, that is about DGP. Now, I come to the issue of Vice-Chancellors of State Universities. The Supreme Court of India again in a judgment in State of West Bengal versus Anindya Sundar Das and others in 2022, asserted and I quote, "Regulation 7.3 of UGC (Minimum Qualifications for appointment of Teachers and Other Academic Staff in Universities and Colleges and Measures for the Maintenance of Standards in Higher Education) Regulations 2018...

MR. CHAIRMAN: Is it UGC or UPSC?

SHRIMATI NIRMALA SITHARAMAN: Sir, it is UGC, University Grants Commission. ...*(Interruptions)*... Regulation 7.3 of UGC (Minimum Qualifications for appointment of Teachers and Other Academic Staff in Universities and Colleges and Measures for the Maintenance of Standards in Higher Education) Regulations 2018 provides for the

minimum qualifications of a VC, selection procedure and the appointment procedure. In case of a conflict between the State legislation and the Central legislation, Central legislation shall prevail by applying the rule/principle of repugnancy as enunciated in Article 254 of the Constitution. ...*(Interruptions)*... Sir, you are a senior advocate. ...*(Interruptions)*... Even though I am not an advocate, I am sure you are going to be conscious of what I am talking of. ...*(Interruptions)*... It is very well for the Members to be conscious of, but don't they have trust in you? ...*(Interruptions)*... You are the Chairman of the House. ...*(Interruptions)*... More importantly, you are a senior advocate of the Supreme Court who is also the Chairman of the House. I wish the Members give you that much of trust and faith in what they are saying. ...*(Interruptions)*... Therefore, any appointment as a Vice-Chancellor contrary to the provisions of the UGC Regulations can be said to be in violation of the statutory provisions, warranting a writ of *quo warranto*. ...*(Interruptions)*... Sir, how do we, therefore, countenance a former Finance Minister coming to the people at large and talking about dilution of federalism when it is clear that when there is a conflict between the two, the Central legislation is the one which is going to prevail under Article 254? Therefore, I just want to highlight a field which is occupied by the judgment of the Supreme Court in these matters to which, by virtue of being a Senior Advocate, the hon. former Finance Minister should be more aligned with the judgment. I wish to indicate to the House that these judgments and the spirit which is caught in these judgments are very important. Therefore, when he is referring as to why the DGP should be appointed by UPSC, why the Vice-Chancellor should be appointed by the UGC and so on, so much of legal material is available. Even if the hon. Members are suggesting that contradictory judgments are there or Judges are reconsidering it, all that apart, when even those are taken on board, when it is *sub judice* before a different bench, when it is so clearly being legally scrutinised, how can we come here and say no, it has to be done and why should the State not do it? No, Sir.

These are matters being taken up as the hon. Member, Wilson is highlighting. ...*(Interruptions)*...

MR. CHAIRMAN: I appreciate. ...*(Interruptions)*... Yes, hon. Finance Minister. ...*(Interruptions)*...

SHRIMATI NIRMALA SITHARAMAN: Yes, these are being taken up by the courts. But, here to come and assert a final word is amazing. Thank you very much, Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Now, Dr. L. Murugan. ...*(Interruptions)*... Nothing is going on record. ...*(Interruptions)*...

MOTION FOR SUSPENSION OF RULE 272

MR. CHAIRMAN: Dr. L. Murugan to move the following motion:

"That the Rule 272 of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in the Council of States in its application to consideration of the Demands for Grants of the related Ministries/Departments for the year 2024-25 by Department Related Standing Committees during the current Session of Rajya Sabha, be suspended."

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS (DR. L. MURUGAN): Sir, I move:

"That the Rule 272 of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in the Council of States in its application to consideration of the Demands for Grants of the related Ministries/Departments for the year 2024-25 by Department Related Standing Committees during the current Session of Rajya Sabha, be suspended."

The question was put and the motion was adopted.

SHRI JAIRAM RAMESH (Karnataka): Sir, why are you moving this? ...*(Interruptions)*...

SHRI SAKET GOKHALE (West Bengal): Sir, I have a point of clarification. ...*(Interruptions)*...

MR. CHAIRMAN: Now, 'Discussion on the working of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs.' Shri Ghanshyam Tiwari to raise a discussion. ...*(Interruptions)*...