

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I deem it a great privilege to be standing here today to express the gratitude of our Government to the respected Rashtrapatiji for his address to Members of both Houses of Parliament

Sir, this is a hard-earned privilege for me since I have had to wait out the entire year to perform this happy task.

I would like to take this opportunity to doubly thank the President – for his Address last year and his Address this year.

Sir, last year, the Rashtrapatiji outlined the nature of the historic mandate that the constituents of the United Progressive Alliance had received from the people of our country. He also outlined the vision underlying the National Common Minimum Programme - a vision of shared prosperity, of an inclusive society, of a caring polity. The President captured the essence of this philosophy in his Address to Parliament this year when he said that we want India to shine, but that it must shine for all.

Sir, this year, the President has outlined the many steps we have taken in office in a brief period of nine months to fulfil some of the most important promises we have made in the National Common Minimum Programme. Read together, the two Addresses of the President offer an overview of the political revolution that the United Progressive Alliance has authored in translating the mandate of the elections of 2004.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the President has paid an eloquent tribute to all those who acted heroically in dealing with this disaster called 'Tsunami'. Our Armed Forces, our para-military forces, our State Governments and our own Central Government authorities acted with great speed to provide relief and then thereon from relief and succour to move on to the task of rehabilitation. I wish to join the hon. Leader of Opposition in paying tributes particularly to our Armed Forces, our Coast Guard, our paramilitary forces for the heroic task that they have accomplished.

Before I go further, I listened very carefully to the advice of the hon. Leader of the Opposition. I respect him. He is a seasoned politician who has been in politics much longer than I have been. When he advised me that I was becoming an invisible Prime Minister, I must solemnly say that, that is a charge I do not plead guilty to. Whether a Prime Minister is visible or not visible should be judged from the conduct of our Government, and when I outline what we have achieved in nine months, it is for the House to judge.

However, I must say, Sir, wherever the people of India were in distress in the last nine months, I along with Soniaji went there. When

our Government was faced with a drought, I went to those areas where the intensity of the drought was so severe that farmers were committing suicides. When there were floods, I was there with the people of Bihar; I was there with the people of Assam. Similarly, I had been to Jammu and Kashmir twice in the last six or seven months. I was there in Andamans; I was there in Tamil Nadu; I was there in Kerala and I was there in Andhra Pradesh, when our people were faced with this Tsunami disaster. Therefore, our record speaks for itself.

If you permit me, Mr. Speaker, I will outline what we have achieved in the last nine months.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, many hon. Members who were able to participate in the debate on the Motion of Thanks to the President on his Address have made every important points. I have taken note of their sentiments. Due to shortage of time, I may not be able to reply to all the points but hon. Members have my assurance that the suggestions that have been made on the floor of this House will receive our most serious attention.

A question has been asked in this House as to what exactly we have done in these past nine months to redeem our pledge to the people. Let me say at the very outset that the President's Address should be read along with the Budget Speech of the Union Finance Minister and the Action Taken Report laid on the Table of the House by the hon. Finance Minister to fully appreciate the enormous work done by our Government in such a short period of time. To supplement this, our Government has also prepared a 'Report to the People', for the first time ever, that informs the general public as to what steps have been taken to implement the National Common Minimum Programme. Copies of this report are being made available to every Member of Parliament. They are also being sent to every media organisation. Never before I believe has a Government been so transparent and proactive in keeping the public informed. I will be the last one to say that we have achieved everything. I recognise that we have miles to go but we will persevere and we shall overcome.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Advaniji talked about the economic policies. A lot of things have happened in our country in the last 50 years. It is my sincere conviction that but for the solid foundation of our economy – the scientific infrastructure that Panditji created, the temples of learning universities, institutes of management and technology that Panditji created, the public sector investments that were made to promote self-reliance – we would not be where we are today.

Changes have been made in the economic policies. In every living society these changes have to be made. Panditji himself used to say that we are living in a dynamic world and we cannot be slaves all the time of

the past. So we have made changes, but the basic thrust of our economic policy remains what was conceived at the time of our Independence – to promote a self-reliant, progressive, humane and egalitarian society.

On the economic front, our efforts to steer Indian economy onto a high-growth path are bearing fruit. Rashtrapatiji has referred to this in his address and this has been further elaborated upon in the Finance Minister's Budget Speech. Our Government was elected on the basis of the mandate that reflected dissatisfaction of 'aam admi' with the way his concerns were being addressed. That is why we have made fighting inflation and generating employment the two most important goals of our economic policy. I am happy to report that the rate of inflation has dipped below five per cent despite the drought and despite the sharp increase in international prices of petroleum products.

We have, at the same time, managed to create a growth momentum which has not only delivered a growth of almost seven per cent this year, but is likely deliver equally impressive growth in the coming years. Our external profile is robust and International Credit Rating Agencies are upgrading our sovereign rating. The balance of payment position is as comfortable as never before. International trade is booming with exports rising at over 25 per cent in dollar terms in April-January, 2005.

Sir, what is more impressive is after many years of investment famine under the NDA regime, we see a clear revival of investment activities and consequently, there is a fine degree of confidence in the future of our economy. This confidence has been bolstered by the growing recognition of the fact that our politics of inclusiveness is creating a more humane social basis for more equitable economic growth. The one area of concern is the high level of fiscal and revenue deficits of State and Central Governments and I sincerely hope that we can, by working together, evolve a national political consensus in dealing with this fiscal challenge. I am sure, Sir, that hon. Members will have an opportunity to debate further on this in the debate on the Union Budget.

Sir, to sustain this sense of optimism our Government has taken steps to create a more equitable economic framework, a framework within which all regions and classes will participate in growth process. There is no point in having a high rate of growth if the benefits are not shared by all sections of society, particularly the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes, Backward Classes, minorities and women. This requires taking steps to empower them, investing in their skill enhancement to enable them to be active participants in the economy, providing a social-legal framework where their rights are recognised and protected and creating an atmosphere of belonging and inclusiveness.

Sir, the results of our efforts will, I am certain, bear fruit to the satisfaction of the people of this country. The foundation of a successful country is a healthy economy, a sound polity, strong institutions and a harmonious society. We are committed to strengthen all these basic foundations of our Republic.

Sir, I have outlined the broad parameters of our economic policy framework. The President's Address refers to seven priority areas and I will draw the attention of the House to these priority areas to give you an idea of what we have been doing and what we plan to do. I recognised yesterday Shri George Fernandesji referred to this matter and said that he did not find a match between what is slated in the President's Address and the Finance Minister's Budget Speech. I do not share that perception and I do not want to show what we have done and what we propose to do to get this country once again moving on to a high growth path, strong growth in output and employment and a stronger commitment to social equity.

Sir, the Rashtrapatiji has referred to the seven priority areas of our Government – agriculture, employment, education, health care, water, urban renewal and infrastructure. Hon. Members will notice the correlation between these high priority areas and our vision of a prosperous, equitable India. Nobody can deny that it is only by focusing on public and private investment in these seven critical areas can we realise sustainable, equitable growth.

Sir, as I had stated earlier, investment in human capital is essential for an inclusive growth process. The importance we attach to elementary education is apparent from the imposition of an education cess and the priority we give to educational programmes. Simultaneously, we are about to launch the National Rural Health Mission which will not only revamp the public health delivery system but which along with the initiatives in nutrition and education, represents our commitment to human capital formation.

Sir, hon. Members, and even Advaniji referred to the fact that the President's Address makes no mention of rural growth. Sir, that perception is also not correct. We have outlined a programme, a comprehensive programme – Bharat Nirman – which attaches high priority to the most important areas which can have a bearing on the polity of rural India.

The "Bharat Nirman" programme outlined both in the President's Address and the Budget Speech gives concrete shape to our commitment to achieving tangible outcomes in irrigation, housing, rural roads, drinking water, electricity and telecommunication connectivity by 2009.

Hon. Shri George Fernandesji appeared to have been disappointed that the Budget Speech did not adequately elaborate on the reference to “Bharat Nirman” in the President’s Address. Sir, “Bharat Nirman” is not a scheme and is not about “Outlays” but about “Outcomes”. This is a four-year programme of rural infrastructure development. The Finance Minister has identified the following outcomes, namely:

- To bring an additional one crore hectares under assured irrigation;
- To connect all villages that have a population of 1000 (or 500 in hilly/tribal areas) with a road;
- To construct 60 lakh additional houses for the poor;
- To provide drinking water to the remaining 74, 000 habitations that are uncovered;
- To reach electricity to the remaining 1, 25, 000 villages and offer electricity connection to 2.3 crore households; and
- To give telephone connectivity to the remaining 66, 822 villages.

PROF. VIJAY KUMAR MALHOTRA (SOUTH DELHI): Where is the allocation? (Interruptions)

अध्यक्ष महोदय - आप बजट पर चर्चा के दौरान इस पर बोलिए । ...(Interruptions)

MR. Speaker: This is not fair. So many hon. Members have spoken. (Interruptions)

अध्यक्ष महोदय - यह क्या हो रहा है ?

PM - Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Budget contains enhanced allocations for each of these crucial areas. Having outlined these outcomes, we are committed to making the required outlays.

On the infrastructure front, we face an enormous task. Poor quality infrastructure is the biggest barrier to the growth of industry and trade. We have been working relentlessly in improving the policy regime for investment in infrastructure – be it power, roads, ports, railways, civil aviation, telecommunications. We will increase public investment in crucial areas and supplement that with private investment. Public-Private Partnership will be attempted where possible and appropriate. The Rural Health Care Mission and the Urban Renewal Mission will facilitate such partnerships. The Urban Renewal Mission will enable the provision of basic amenities in urban areas while at the same time providing world class infrastructure in our cities.

We have outlined water as a priority areas. I think, Shri Suresh Prabhu yesterday mentioned about the neglect of water. I plead not guilty. I have listened to the many points raised by hon. Members

regarding policies pertaining to water availability and utilisation. Sir, I would like to urge hon. Members to impress upon our political leaders at all levels of our democratic governance that we should resist the temptation of playing politics with water. Our Government is committed to providing access to water to all. We have to renew the spirit of cooperation in dealing with this massive challenge.

Sir, an important area of our policy focus is education. Many hon. Members have drawn our attention to the many challenges of access and excellence in education. The National Knowledge Commission that we propose to constitute will focus attention on the quality of our educational system. The issue of access is being addressed by the various programmes we are funding with the Education Cess. Our emphasis on mid-day meals programme is also aimed at improving access to education.

Our Government has been in office now for nine months. And I do wish to point out, as a matter of pride, that India's prestige in the world has never been as high as it is today.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the last nine months, the world has been fascinated by the strength and vigour of our democratic processes. We are seen as a shining example of a successful democracy, a polity which periodically redistributes power to reflect the aspirations of our people.

India is today a role model in many ways in managing a multi-racial, multi-religious and a multi-lingual society through effective democratic processes. This is a strength we must all cherish and nurture for this is the strength that enables us to cross all challenges in fulfilling the vision of our founding fathers, a vision, as I said, of an inclusive, just and humane society. The election of the UPA Government last year was a manifestation of the people's mandate for change. We need to respect that and permit our institutions to function effectively. ..(Interruptions)

श्री सुशील कुमार मोदी (भागलपुर) - नक्सलाइट्स के बारे में क्या हुआ ?(व्यवधान)

अध्यक्ष महोदय: यह क्या हो रहा है ?(Interruptions)

Mr. Speaker : Please sit down. You are all senior Members, behaving in this irresponsible manner! Nothing will be recorded unless the Prime Minister yields.(Interruptions)

Mr. Speaker : Unless the Prime Minister yields, no comments will be recorded.

Dr. Manmohan Singh : I would now like to come to internal security issues, the North-East and Jammu & Kashmir issues, which have been raised by the hon. Members of the Opposition.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, in the nine months in Office, our Government has also worked hard to improve the internal security situation in our country. We have been purposive but humane in bolstering the security environment. We have developed a comprehensive and systematic approach to all internal security issues, whether they be related to Left-wing extremism or militancy in the North East and Jammu and Kashmir.

We are concerned about the spread of Left-wing extremism and it is our sincere assurance that we will work with State Governments in tackling this problem in all its dimensions – political, economic, social and administrative. We will address the underlying causes for disaffection and alienation among sections, which tilt towards such extremism. The Union Government is providing assistance to States to meet some of their security-related expenditure and has also decided to bear the cost of deployment of additional Central forces.

Developments in our neighbourhood are also a matter of concern in this regard. Our Government will be taking a lead role in developing a coordinated approach to this problem. Our Government's policy is to engage militants in a dialogue if they abjure the path of violence, to have appropriate and just laws and to modernise security forces so that they can be effective instruments of State action. In this, the Union Government will be a partner with all affected Governments in finding enduring solutions.

Our commitment to a caring society based on the rule of law was reflected in our approach to the situation in the North Eastern region, particularly the State of Manipur. We have reached out to the people with a helping hand, a hand committed to understanding their genuine grievances. The joy, which I saw, on the faces of an unprecedented crowd of Manipuris on the occasion of the handing over of the Kangla Fort gives me the necessary confidence that we are on the right track and that the State can move forward towards normalcy.

Shri Advaniji asked me about the discussions with the NSCN. The negotiations are going on and moving at a pace, which is satisfactory. We are in the process of discussing each other's point of view. I am confident that these discussions will be brought to a successful conclusion.

I should also say that until our Government came to power, all these discussions were being held outside the country. Our Government took the view that these discussions must take place within our own country and in that we have succeeded. That alone is a positive development in dealing with problems of Nagaland.

Sir, our approach to the problems in Jammu and Kashmir has reaped a rich harvest in the manner in which the people of the State

came forward to participate in local government elections held very recently. The forces of democracy were greatly encouraged by the turn out and the verdict. There has been a perceptibly lower level of violence in the State of Jammu and Kashmir this year. The people are yearning for peace and normalcy. I myself have been twice to the Jammu and Kashmir State. Considerable enthusiasm has been generated by the effective manner in which the reconstruction package has been grounded. The infiltration level has come down by more than 60 per cent during 2004. There is a hope on the horizon and if we keep up the tempo of economic activity there, we may see further improvement in the scenario.

Sir, given the external dimension of terrorism and other trans-border crimes like smuggling of arms, counterfeit currency, drug trafficking, it is very vital to strengthen our international borders. The Government has taken various measures, which include fencing of borders, improving road networks in border area, and deployment of hitech electronic surveillance equipment on the borders.

Sir, I would like to reiterate once again that our Government is not soft on terrorism and militancy. It, however, willing to realise the inhuman situation created by some of our laws and therefore willing to modify them. We are committed to the National Common Minimum Programme which states that there will be no compromise on terrorism. However, we were equally concerned about the misuse of POTA and we decided to repeal it while enforcing the existing laws more strictly. However, the existing legal framework has been substantially strengthened by amending the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 to handle terrorism-related issues more effectively.

Sir, I could go on, but in the House no Member has brought up issues of foreign policies. Therefore, I will skip that because of the lateness of the hour. There is, however, one matter that I do wish to refer to and that is our relations with Pakistan. After my meeting with Gen. Musharraf on the side-lines of the United Nations General Assembly, all items of composite dialogue are under discussion. We are moving forward and I must say that nothing brings the people of our sub-continent more together than our love for cricket and Bollywood cinema. I am equally conscious of the fact today that even as I speak in this House I am competing for the nation's attention with young men like Sehwag and Kamal. Perhaps that is how it should be. Indeed how nice it would be if we conduct our affairs in this august House with the same spirit of sportsmanship that our young cricketers exhibit on the playing field of the sub-continent.

Sir, when our citizens went to Pakistan for the last test series, they returned with tales of bonhomie and warm hospitality. I am delighted to say that our people have returned this hospitality to the thousands of visitors from Pakistan. Relations between nations are after all nothing more than relations between their people. I'm sure that time will work to heal our wounds and create an environment of shared prosperity and peace in this sub-continent in which we can all live and work for the greater good of our sub-continent.

Sir, I am happy to inform the hon. Members of the House that I have decided to invite President Musharraf to come to India to watch the cricket match between our two teams. It is my earnest desire that the people in our neighbouring country and their leaders should feel free to visit us whenever they wish to do so. Be it to watch a cricket match; be it to do some shopping; or be it to meet friends and families – India is proud to be an open society and an open economy. I do hope that President Musharraf and his family will enjoy their visit to our country..(Interruptions)

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I will be failing in my duty if I do not express my sincere regret at the fact that the proceedings of the House have once again been disrupted in a manner that does not do this House proud... (Interruptions)

Prof. Vijay Kumar Malhotra (South Delhi) : What happened today morning?(Interruptions)

DR. MANMOHAN SINGH : I share the sentiments expressed by some Members that our democracy gives us the freedom and the right to express our views without fear or favour and we must make use of these freedoms in a proper manner. We cannot allow cynicism to grow about the relevance and role of democratic institutions and of elected representatives. There is so much work before us and we have not been able to give our time to it. I share the sentiment of our revered Rashtrapatiji when he said, and I quote:

“The people of India anxiously await your views and your decisions on these crucial economic and social legislations. I urge you, hon. Members, to repay the trust and confidence that the people have reposed in you by dedicating yourselves to the orderly consideration of these Bills. Every minute of Parliament's time is precious and every citizen and taxpayer values it greatly. I sincerely hope you will make the most economical use of the time at your disposal and meet the voter's and the citizen's expectations and fulfil their aspirations.”

These were the words of our Rashtrapatiji.

Hon. Members may have genuine concerns that they wish to give expression to in the House. After all, that is what their voters would want

them to do. I would be the last one to chastise hon. Members for giving vent to their heartfelt concerns. Yet, there are ways in which we can express these sentiments without disrupting the proceedings of the House.(Interruptions)

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I must compliment you in all sincerity for your extreme patience and good humour in dealing with the situation in the House. I am sure the hon. Leader of the Opposition agrees with me that we must all try our best to uphold the dignity and decorum of this august House and never allow anything to happen that would demean it in the eyes of our citizens and the world at large. I appeal once again to all hon. Members to participate actively and effectively in the proceedings of the House, putting forward their views in an appropriate manner.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I thank you for your indulgence and would like to once again express my gratitude to the President for his thoughtful address. I would like this vote of thanks to the President's Address to be passed unanimously.