

THE PRIME MINISTER (DR. MANMOHAN SINGH): Mr. Chairman, Sir, Shri Prithviraj Chavan, my colleague, in his introductory statement has covered a lot of territory. In the final reply to the debate, he will deal with many technical issues which have arisen in the debate.

My purpose is rather limited. I wish to state categorically that this Bill completes in a way our journey to end the nuclear apartheid which the world had imposed on India in the year 1974. To say that this is being done to promote American interest and to help American Corporations, I think is far from being the truth. As far as I am concerned, this is not the first time that I have been accused of doing such a thing. I recall and Advaniji would recall in 1992, when I had presented the Budget of the Congress Government, the whole Opposition, with a few exceptions, rose to say that I should be impeached, that this Budget had been prepared in the United States.

Mr. Chairman, Sir, history will be a judge, what we did in 1991 and how it has contributed to what. Shri Jaswant Singhji calls a resurgent and assertive India. I leave it to the people of this country to judge. It is with this very motivation that our Government has tried to complete the journey towards ending the regime of nuclear apartheid. To say that we have in a way compromised with India's national interest would be a travesty of facts. 

Without going into the details, I would once again assert that while we have pursued this Bill with determination, this process was started in 1999. When I looked at the old files of the Atomic Energy Commission, I found there was a lot of work done by our scientists, by our technologists. They all came to the conclusion that India does need such a law. At that time we were not in power. But it is certainly true that when we came to power, in our discussions with the United States we signed a Memorandum of Understanding on the 10th of September in which we said we would bring such a Bill and enact such a law. This is not, in any way, contrary to India's interest and the fact that it was stated in that memorandum was not certainly an act of anti-national intent as Shri Jaswant Singh tried to imply.

Mr. Chairman, Sir, these are some of the brief comments that I wanted to make. About technical issues that have been raised, my colleague will reply. But I do agree with Shri Jaswant Singh that nuclear energy, utilisation of nuclear energy is a serious issue and that it can be misused. Therefore, I think, all actions leading to use of nuclear energy, I think, must be done with utmost care. His concern about nuclear safety is one which I fully share and I assure the House that we have an independent Atomic Energy Regulatory Board which is an independent entity. The fact that we have so many reactors, 40 reactors and that there has not been one single incident is a tribute to our scientists and technologists who man our nuclear facilities.

Mr. Chairman, Sir, even then I take note of the sentiment that we cannot rest on our laurels. We will do everything to strengthen the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board to ensure that safety concerns receive the attention that they must if we are to use nuclear power as a major source for generating and meeting India's need for energy.

Mr. Chairman, Sir, a question has been raised whether nuclear power is a viable economic option. As of now, all the studies that I have seen done in the atomic energy establishments do state that beyond a certain distance from the coal mines nuclear energy is the preferred option even now. But technology is not constant. Technology is moving and moving fast enough. I cannot predict what the future holds for us but I would like that if the future does throw up the proposition that nuclear power is a viable option, then India should have the ability to make use of nuclear power. Development is not about fixing the technological framework. Development, in the final analysis, is an act of widening the development options that are open to the country and what our Government has done has created more opportunities, more options for India in future to meet its energy requirements.

It is of course certainly true that presently hydro power presents limited options. Coal also offers limited options insofar as the effect on climate change and carbon emissions are concerned. Therefore, nuclear power is an option which we should simply not ignore. What we have done, I think, enables India to enter into nuclear

commerce with other willing countries in order to widen its development options in meeting its energy requirements.

Mr. Chairman, Sir, with these words, I beg of this House to pass this Bill with unanimity.