

MR. SPEAKER : The question is:-

[English]

"That this House do agree with the Forty-sixth Report of the Business Advisory Committee presented to the House on the 4th March, 2008."

You please read English correctly.

[Placed in Library. See No. LT 8160/2008]

The motion was adopted

12.10½ hrs.

12.10 hrs.

DEMANDS FOR SUPPLEMENTARY GRANTS
(RAILWAYS) (2007-08)

DEMANDS FOR EXCESS GRANTS (RAILWAYS),
(2005-06)

[English]

[English]

THE MINISTER OF RAILWAYS (SHRI LALU PRASAD) :
Sir, I beg to present a statement (Hindi and English versions) showing the Supplementary Demands for Grants in respect of the Budget (Railways) for 2007-08.

THE MINISTER OF RAILWAYS (SHRI LALU PRASAD) :
Sir, I beg to present a statement (Hindi and English versions) showing the Demands for Excess Grants in respect of the Budget (Railways) for 2005-06.

[Translation]

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, Sir isn't my English strong?

Now is it correct or not?

[English]

[English]

MR. SPEAKER : It sounds almost like English.

MR. SPEAKER : No translation is needed. It can sound both Hindi and English.

[Placed in Library. See No. LT 8161/2008]

SHRI BRAJA KISHORE TRIPATHY (Puri) : Mr. Speaker, Sir, there is something in the List of Business and the hon. Minister is presenting something else. He is presenting the demands which are not there in the List of Business. The Demands for Excess Grants is for 2005-06, but he is presenting them for 2007-08.

12.12 hrs.

MOTION OF THANKS ON THE PRESIDENT'S
ADDRESS – Contd.

MR. SPEAKER : Well, give him that liberty. He has gone a year in advance.

[English]

[Translation]

THE PRIME MINISTER (DR. MANMOHAN SINGH) :
Mr. Speaker, Sir, I rise to join all the Members of this august House in conveying our sincere thanks to the hon. President of India for her inspiring Address.

SHRI LALU PRASAD : These are supplementary demands.

Sir, in the 60th year of our Republic it is a matter of

pride for us to have as the first lady of the State a very distinguished woman and it was our privilege to listen to her inspiring Address.

Sir, in the 60th year of our Republic it is a matter of pride for us to have as the first lady of the State a very distinguished woman and it was our privilege to listen to her inspiring Address.

Sir, it is also a matter of satisfaction that over the last three days we have had a fascinating debate on the issues covered in the Rashtrapati's Address. While some of the hon. Members have expressed their satisfaction at the performance of the Government on many fronts, there have been others who have found fault with us on some counts. This, for me, is the essence of democracy. Democracy is about debate, about argument and constructive criticism. Democracy is about acknowledging the existence of multiple view points, about tolerance for dissent and diversity, about respecting the opinions held by others without necessarily agreeing with them. The debate we have witnessed is in the best traditions of parliamentary democracy. This is what makes our nation unique and makes me hopeful for our collective future. I sincerely hope that we will have more of such debates and less disruption which has become a sad feature of our parliamentary democracy.

Sir, as I listened to the various Members of this House, I drew considerable satisfaction from the fact that the vision of inclusive growth spelt out in the hon. President's Address is something about which there is unanimity on both sides of the House. That we need strong resurgent growth to get rid of chronic poverty, ignorance and disease which still characterize millions of our people in our country, is universally accepted. The fact that our growth rate now takes us to the ranks of some of the fastest growing economies in the world is a matter of pride for all Indians.

Sir, growth is a necessary condition for inclusive growth. But we have always recognised that growth by itself need not get rid of vast poverty unless there are strategies

in place to empower the most disadvantaged sections of our community. The President's Address spells out of that vision which has guided the work of our Government in the last four years.

What is that vision? First of all, as I said, we need strong, resurgent growth. We need growth to create more jobs, we need strong resurgent growth to get more revenues for public finances so that we can spend more money on social inclusion, on education, on health, rural development, on improving rural and urban infrastructure. The fact that the last four years have witnessed a record growth rate, therefore, is a matter of satisfaction.

But our Government, and our Common Minimum Programme, recognise that growth by itself does not necessarily ensure that the fruits of growth will be equitably distributed and therefore, it is the duty of any popular Government to address that question, to empower the poorest sections of our society so that they can become active participants in the processes of growth and that is what we have done.

First of all, we are all agreed on both sides of the House that we need strong growth in agriculture. We must also ensure that our farmers, particularly, small and marginal farmers, do get good remunerative prices, their productivity increases, that they do become partners in processes of agricultural growth.

Second, it is also agreed by both sides of the House that in a country where 90 per cent of our people are in the unorganised sector, where institutions of social security are inadequate, we must maintain a reasonable control on prices because inflation is a tax which hurts the poor much more than the rich. So, that is agreed on both sides.

The third thing, which I believe, also is generally agreed on both sides of the House is that for inclusion, we need that all our children should have the advantage or the benefit of equality of opportunity. It cannot be done overnight, but education is the biggest single means of

[Dr. Manmohan Singh]

empowering our children to lead a life of dignity and to become partners in the processes of growth and therefore, we need strong commitment to the expansion of education. Not only primary education and elementary education, but also a strong commitment to the expansion of tertiary education because we live in knowledge intensive world economy and unless India's tertiary education sector grows in accordance with the need for a skilled manpower, we will be left behind. Sir, that is what the President's Address spells out, what we are planning or what we have done in the field of education.

Hon. Health Minister, when he was replying to the questions a few minutes ago, listed the achievements of this Government in taking of health care to the poorer sections of our society. I am not saying that we have succeeded in reducing infant mortality rates or maternal mortality rates to what they should be. This is not a short-term process. It will take time.

But the number of doctors, the number of nurses, the number of specialists that are now in place, I think, is much larger than what it was four years ago. So, I am convinced that if we follow this process, we will see a distinct improvement in the health status of our children, in the health status of our women. That is as it should be.

We also know that in our agriculture there are a large number of landless workers who are very vulnerable. Also, although agriculture offers employment for utilisation of labour, there are times of the year when no work is available in agricultural operation. Therefore, we need some mechanism to supplement employment opportunities, to soften the harsh edges of extreme poverty in rural areas. That is the case for having a nation-wide employment guarantee for hundred days, that is now in place. I am not saying that this one Act can abolish poverty, but if implemented honestly, if implemented efficiently, it can soften the harsh edges of extreme poverty. The Central Government now has raised the minimum wage rate to

above Rs. 80 per day. If work for hundred days is available, each family, even if it has only one earning member, would have an entitlement of Rs. 8000 per annum. I say that this will help to ameliorate the conditions of those who belong to the lowest rung of social and economic strata.

Also, we all agree that if the fruits of development have to accrue to all sections of population, it is essential to recognise that the Dalits, the Scheduled Tribes and minorities have not benefited adequately from the processes of growth. Therefore, we have put strategies in place. Some were there earlier. We have expanded those. In expanding health care, in expanding education, we are paying particular attention to the needs of areas which have a high concentration of Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe and minority populations.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition talked about this as the appeasement of minorities. I do not plead guilty to that charge. It is a process of empowerment of all disadvantaged sections of our population. I take pride in saying that our Government has the courage to recognise that our minorities have not benefited appropriately from the processes of growth, and therefore the time has come to pay a little more attention to their needs of education, of health. *...(Interruptions)*

MR. SPEAKER : He is not yielding. If you have anything to say, if you agree, at the end I can allow.

...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER : Let us at least show respect to the Prime Minister of the country! As the hon. Leader of the Opposition is entitled to full respect, he is also entitled to full respect.

DR. MANMOHAN SINGH : Therefore, what we are trying to do is to reduce the inequalities of opportunity, the gap that exists between regions, the gap that exists between classes, the gap that exists between urban and rural areas. This is a part of the process of empowerment. It is the essence of the process of inclusive growth. When

I listened to the debate, there may have been some problems with regard to the treatment of minorities. But, by and large, all sections of this House agreed that inclusive growth is the essence of a participatory democracy; it is an integral part of the value system that is embedded in our magnificent Constitution. And the fact that our Government has advanced the cause of inclusive growth, I think is some matter of satisfaction for all of us.

Sir, I would be the last one to say that everything is rosy in the Garden of Eden. We have increased allocations for infrastructure, for rural infrastructure under Bharat Nirman. We have increased massively the allocations for education, for rural health, for urban infrastructure under the Jawaharlal Nehru Urban Renewal Mission. But one has to recognize that the Central Government can only increase allocations. It can give guidelines to States. But India lives in States and, therefore, it is the joint responsibility of the Centre and the States to work in all sincerity to implement the agenda of this inclusive growth that we all feel our nation should be and is committed to implementing. Therefore, today, we have a situation where there are various Parties represented in this House, they are ruling in the States. So, it can be easily said that without more active collaboration and cooperation between political parties across the spectrum of this House, I think, we cannot succeed in carrying forward the process of inclusive growth that this country needs. Therefore, I appeal to all segments of this House to recognize the great opportunities that India has. I have often said that shortage of resources is not today a problem for our country. We have shown in these last four years how tax revenues can become buoyant and I compliment my colleague, the hon. Finance Minister for that. We have, therefore, been able to spend lot more money on education, on health and on rural development. We have also shown that where there is a will we can improve the functioning of the public sector system and I compliment my colleague, the Railway Minister for the magnificent way he has managed the Railway finances.

Sir, I, therefore, appeal to all segments of this House

that at least when it comes to issues of development, we should forget our Party differences. Today, it is possible to abolish poverty in the life of a single generation. If our economy grows at the rate of nine to ten per cent per annum, then we would be doubling our national income in a period of about seven to eight years. If along with growth promotion strategies, we have in place programmes for improving the educational status of our children and improving the health status of our women, then there will be a definite positive impact on poverty. This is a historic opportunity and we must make full use of it to realize this vast latent potential of our great country.

Sir, I started by saying that all of us have agreed that the interest of our farmers and the state of our agriculture is a prime determinant of whether we are moving towards inclusive growth or not. I will be the last one to say that everything is rosy with the state of agriculture. When we came to power in 2004, agriculture was in a state of distress. We had to restructure agricultural debt both in 2004 and once again for the distressed districts in 2006. Why has this happened? If you look at the statistics from 1980-81 to the year 1996-97, Indian agriculture grew at the rate of about 3.5 per cent per annum.

After 1996-97 and till the year 2003-04, a large number of years were NDA years, the rate of growth of agriculture fell to 2.3 per cent...(Interruptions) There was a fall during the NDA period in the share of national income, which went into investment in agriculture.

Today, our colleagues from that side talk about the interest of farmers. I look at what were they doing in providing more incentives to our farmers. During the Congress regime from 1991 to 1996, the terms of trade increased year after year in favour of agriculture. During the NDA regime, the terms of trade and the prices to farmers deteriorated. What was the concern for the farmers? You look at procurement prices. The NDA, in five years, increased procurement prices by a pittance of Rs. 50 in four or five years. Look at the record of our Government.

[Dr. Manmohan Singh]

Therefore, I thought, I would mention some of these data, because Shri Anant Geete referred to this problem. In 1999-2000, the Minimum Support Price for wheat was Rs. 580 per quintal. The previous Government, that is, the NDA Government, raised it by Rs. 50 in years at a small incremental rate of Rs. 10, which over a period of five years was 8.6 per cent only. Compare this with the last four years of our Government. We have raised the Minimum Support Price for wheat by Rs. 370, a rise of 56 per cent in four years. I expect Mr. Dhindsa, at least, to applaud ...*(Interruptions)*

In the case of paddy too, we have raised the Minimum Support Price by 33 per cent in four years as compared to a small pittance of 12 per cent in five years by the NDA Government.

Gross Capital Formation in agriculture as a proportion of GDP has improved under our regime from a low of 10.2 per cent in the year 2003-04 to 12.5 per cent in the year 2006-07. After many years, agricultural growth touched almost four per cent last year. Those who neglected the welfare of farmers, depressed the Minimum Support Prices and the term for trade for agriculture, those who exported our food surpluses away at a loss, have no right to be advocating welfare of the farmers.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, our Government is convinced that India cannot prosper if our farmers do not prosper. I recall from my childhood the words of Oliver Goldsmith:

"Ill fare the land, to hastening ills a prey,
Where wealth accumulates, and men decay;
Princes and Lords may flourish, or may fade;
A breath can make them, as a breath has made;
But a bold peasantry, their country's pride,
When once destroyed can never be supplied."

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is the distress of this bold peasantry that brought the UPA to office when the NDA was talking about 'Shining India'. This distress is the legacy of the NDA

rule, a rule during which, policies were anti-farmer, anti-agriculture...*(Interruptions)* Low Minimum Support Prices impoverished our farmers. Mr. Dhindsa should know it...*(Interruptions)*. They needed a fresh flow of credit. The tripling of agricultural credit flow by us did not address the problems of past debt.

The debt relief, we have now announced is our attempt to finally remove the burden of the NDA period from our farmers' shoulders. We are determined to end agricultural distress. We will not stop till we have wiped the tears from the eyes of all farmers...*(Interruptions)*

That, Mr. Speaker, Sir, is why our Government took the historic initiative to waive farmers' loans on an unprecedented scale. A debt relief of this magnitude has never been conceived or attempted before. It is an income transfer on an unparalleled scale. If bankruptcy is a permissible form of business outcome in industry, what is irrational about this waiver? It will allow a fresh flow of institutional credit to farmers. It will clean up banker's balance-sheets; it will stimulate economic activity in rural India and I do not make any apology...*(Interruptions)*

The Finance Minister...*(Interruptions)*

MR. SPEAKER : This is not right, Kindly listen to him.

...*(Interruptions)*

[Translation]

PROF. VIJAY KUMAR MALHOTRA (South Delhi) : Where are those 60,000 crore rupees?...*(Interruptions)*

[English]

MR. SPEAKER : This is not fair. Let him reply. He is entitled to reply.

...*(Interruptions)*

[Translation]

MR. SPEAKER : Please sit down. You may speak when there is a discussion on the budget.

...*(Interruptions)*

[English]

MR. SPEAKER : Please show respect to the Prime Minister.

...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER : You may raise it in the discussion on the Budget. That was done in the Budget, you may raise it in the discussion on the Budget.

...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER : You should raise it in a proper manner so that there may be a reply.

...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER : Do not record anything except the hon. Prime Ministers. Unless he yields, nobody would be allowed to speak.

...(Interruptions)

[Translation]

MR. SPEAKER : Please sit down.

...(Interruptions)

[English]

MR. SPEAKER : Please sit down. Nothing is being recorded.

...(Interruptions)*

MR. SPEAKER : What is this going on? You are disturbing your Prime Minister.

...(Interruptions)

DR. MANMOHAN SINGH : Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Finance Minister has mentioned that the total cost of the debt relief will be around Rs. 60,000 crore. This covers

*Not recorded.

all Scheduled, Commercial Banks, Regional Rural Banks and Cooperative Banks. It covers both production and direct investment credit. It is not just about non-performing assets. It is also about overdues. And, it will benefit about four crore farmers. The debt relief will be a simple exercise, which we will complete by June. It will not be a long drawn out affair.

I agree that there will be farmers outside the pale of institutional credit, who do not benefit from this waiver. For them, we have operated since 2004, a programme of financial inclusion so that each and every farmer has a bank account and is able to access institutional credit.

Hon. Members would remember that in the year 2004, nearly a month after we come to office, we adopted a scheme under which, those farmers who are indebted to moneylenders can swap their debt by going to the Commercial Banks and substitute the debt of moneylenders by institutional credit. That scheme still operates. And, many farmers in Andhra Pradesh have benefited by it.

...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER : Shri Ananth Kumar, this is very unfortunate. I will not allow.

...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER : Do not record anything. Nothing will be recorded.

...(Interruptions)*

THE MINISTER OF PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS AND MINISTER OF INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING (SHRI PRIYA RANJAN DASMUNSI) : Do not do like that.

...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER : No, this is not fair. You cannot have a running commentary now. I am sorry. Please take your seat.

...(Interruptions)

*Not recorded.

MR. SPEAKER : Please take your seat.

...(Interruptions)

SHRI PRIYA RANJAN DASMUNSI : If it is misleading, give a privilege notice. ...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER : I request that this is not fair. You cannot go on asking him questions. Please take your seat.

...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER : Do not do that. He has not conceded. He has not yielded.

...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER : Please sit down.

...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER : Nothing is being recorded. Do not record anything.

...(Interruptions)*

MR. SPEAKER : What is this going on? You cannot go on asking running questions here. No, I will not allow this.

...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER : Shri Athawale, please sit down.

...(Interruptions)

[Translation]

MR. SPEAKER : Please sit down.

...(Interruptions)

[English]

MR. SPEAKER : Do not record it.

...(Interruptions)*

*Not recorded.

MR. SPEAKER : I request the hon. Members on all sides to cooperate.

...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER : Why are you talking? You cannot ask questions like that. You are here for long. You cannot ask questions.

...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER : Then, the Prime Minister will end his speech. What is this going on? It is very unfair, Shri Anath Kumar. I can only say this.

...(Interruptions)

[Translation]

MR. SPEAKER : What is this going on? Please take your seats.

...(Interruptions)

PROF. VIJAY KUMAR MALHOTRA : First make their shouting brigade sit down. ...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER : First, you keep quiet.

...(Interruptions)

[English]

MR. SPEAKER : You sit down please.

...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER : Do not stand there.

...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER : Why are you shouting?

...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER : This is the way! I am very sorry. It is a very sad moment.

...(Interruptions)

SHRI ANANTH KUMAR (Bangalore South) : We are only saying that the hon. Prime Minister is misleading the House. ...*(Interruptions)*

[Translation]

MR. SPEAKER : Please take you seats.

...*(Interruptions)*

[English]

SHRI PRIYA RANJAN DASMUNSI : Shri Ananth Kumar, you see the Rule Book. If he is misleading, give the privilege notice. ...*(Interruptions)*

MR. SPEAKER : He will not go on answering your questions. You have no right to ask, not in this manner. I do not allow.

...*(Interruptions)*

MR. SPEAKER : No, I do not allow. Then, you go on shouting.

...*(Interruptions)*

SHRI ANANTH KUMAR : Sir, we are not shouting. ...*(Interruptions)* What is this?...*(Interruptions)*

MR. SPEAKER : This is very unfortunate.

...*(Interruptions)*

[Translation]

MR. SPEAKER : You also sit down.

...*(Interruptions)*

[English]

MR. SPEAKER : Shri Athawale, will you sit down?

...*(Interruptions)*

MR. SPEAKER : I will ask you to go out.

...*(Interruptions)*

MR. SPEAKER : Very well. Then the Prime Minister may conclude his speech and go away.

...*(Interruptions)*

MR. SPEAKER : This is not the way to function. You are a senior Member. You are behaving in this way.

...*(Interruptions)*

[Translation]

MR. SPEAKER : Mr. Babbar, please sit down.

...*(Interruptions)*

[English]

MR. SPEAKER : It is a matter of great sorrow.

Mr. Prime Minister, please continue.

DR. MANMOHAN SINGH : Mr. Speaker, Sir, the sheer size of our gesture shows our commitment to our farmers, our determination to improve their lot and our desire to see agriculture restored to its rightful place in the Indian economy.

Sir, Shri Advani and some other Members have asked where the money is going to come from. Doubts have been raised about the resources required for this write off. Before I answer that, let me remind the Leader of the Opposition that what we have done is nothing more than picking up the unpaid distress bills which the NDA Government left behind. I would like to assure the hon. Members of this House that this package will be well-funded. Whereas farmers will see the benefits of the relief package immediately, banks will be compensated as and when the loans become due. The details are being worked out. I believe that the dues to the banks, including production and investment credit, will materialise over a period of three to four years. ...*(Interruptions)*

PROF. VIJAY KUMAR MALHOTRA : You will not be there by that time. *...(Interruptions)*

DR. MANMOHAN SINGH : We will make adequate provisions from tax and non-tax revenues over this period to fund this package. *...(Interruptions)* Let there be no doubt that the banking system will not be constrained in any manner, and there will be no contraction in liquidity. *...(Interruptions)*

As the Finance Minister has requested this House, we need the unstinted support of the entire House to help implement this decision. We should not grudge farmers their due. *...(Interruptions)*

Mr. Speaker, Sir, several Members referred to the problem of inflation. I do agree that it is the bounden duty of any Government in this country to worry about inflation if the rate of inflation exceeds the limits of tolerance of 4 to 5 per cent. *...(Interruptions)* I would like to submit to this august House that our Government has worked sincerely to contain the rise in prices compared with the background and the environment, which we face. When the NDA Government. *...(Interruptions)*

SHRI ANANTH KUMAR : Sir, NDA is compared for everything. What is this? *...(Interruptions)* He is misleading the House. *...(Interruptions)*

MR. SPEAKER : This is your opinion. You must express it, but not now. You can express it later on.

...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER : The discussion on the Budget is coming up in the House. You can say this at that time.

...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER : Please let him conclude.

...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER : Let us hear him first.

...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER : Obviously, there cannot be unanimity on this, but this is not the way to express your views.

...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER : I earnestly request you that let us please hear him.

...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER : We should give full hearing and uninterrupted hearing when the distinguished Prime Minister or the distinguished Leader of the Opposition is speaking. This is what both of them are entitled to in the House. I am requesting you for it.

...(Interruptions)

SHRI ANANTH KUMAR : We are only requesting that he should not mislead the House. *...(Interruptions)*

MR. SPEAKER : This is not the way to do it. Mr. Ananth Kumar, you are a senior Member, and you know it.

...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER : What is going on in this House?

...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER : Would the Prime Minister not be allowed to speak in this House?

...(Interruptions)

SHRI ANANTH KUMAR : He is referring to NDA. *...(Interruptions)*

MR. SPEAKER : It is his job, and you can reply to it. You have criticized the UPA.

...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER : Please sit down.

...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER : Do not do this. I am very unhappy.

...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER : Only the Prime Minister's observations will be taken down and others, without leave, would not be recorded.

...(Interruptions)

DR. MANMOHAN SINGH : Mr. Speaker, Sir, I was merely describing the background of why inflation rates differ from one period to another. International oil prices were at an all-time low when the NDA Government was in office.

We came to office in 2004, and the oil price per barrel was US \$ 36; today it is close to US \$ 100. The NDA maintained a modicum of price stability by depressing the prices payable to our farmers. We do not want to follow that course. ...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER : This is very strange. What are you doing? I am appealing to the Leader of the Opposition because this is not the way.

...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER : I can only say that this is extremely unfortunate. I do not know what has happened to you, Mr. Ananth Kumar.

...(Interruptions)

[Translation]

MR. SPEAKER : Please sit down.

...(Interruptions)

[English]

MR. SPEAKER : What is happening to you? I am surprised at what you are doing today.

...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER : Do not record one word of the interruptions.

...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER : This is most unfortunate.

...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER : Well, I have to ask you now not to disturb. If you are not prepared to listen to his speech, you need not remain here; you may leave.

...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER : Please take your seat. Do not add to it. Why are you adding to it?

...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER : You are not behaving properly.

...(Interruptions)

DR. MANMOHAN SINGH : We are committed to reasonable price stability, but we will not be a party to maintain so-called price stability by neglecting the prices that are to be payable to our farmers. Our commitment to reasonable price stability should be obvious from what I am going to say. The prices of petroleum products have more than tripled in the last four years, but we have not increased the price of kerosene. We have made only a marginal addition to prices of diesel and prices of petrol. We have not changed in these four years the prices payable by our farmers for their fertilizers. ...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER : Then, nobody will be allowed to speak. If they disturb, what shall I do? What can I do then? You always object, if somebody raises questions, and then you will not reciprocate.

...(Interruptions)

[Translation]

MR. SPEAKER : What is wrong in his statement. You may speak when you get a chance.

...(Interruptions)

[English]

DR. MANMOHAN SINGH : Mr. Speaker, Sir, in these four years, despite rising costs, we have not changed the prices payable by our farmers for fertilizers. We have not increased ...*(Interruptions)*

MR. SPEAKER : I do not know how you want this House to function. It is one of the most important debates of the Parliamentary system on which the reply is being given by the Head of the Government. You are not prepared to listen and go on making running commentary asking him to explain to you every sentence. This is not the way to function in this House. If you do not want to hear the Prime Minister, I will request him to conclude.

...*(Interruptions)*

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE) : They cannot dictate like this.

MR. SPEAKER : The running commentaries should be stopped.

DR. MANMOHAN SINGH : Mr. Speaker, Sir, we have paid handsomely the prices to our farmers, but as a measure of our commitment to the welfare of the weaker sections, we have not changed in these last four years the prices payable under the Public Distribution System either by people Above the Poverty Line or people Below the Poverty Line. This is an unparalleled record which I think cannot be equalled. This itself in should be a convincing evidence of our Government's deep and abiding commitment to price stability and to the welfare of the weaker sections of our community.

The House has my assurance that we are committed to maintaining reasonable price stability despite an adverse international environment. Today commodity prices are rising; prices of imported vegetable oils are skyrocketing; prices of imported foodstuffs are increasing. Even then we will take effective measures to ensure that weaker sections

of our population are not hurt by these adversities coming from abroad.

Sir, Mr. Advani referred to the Women's Reservation Bill and I should like to comment on that. It is a matter of deep regret to me that we have not been able to move forward on this front. Our Government's commitment is sincere to the reservation of seats for women in State Legislatures and Parliament. There should be no doubt about that. We have made, in the last three years, efforts to evolve a broad-based consensus. The hon. Leader of the Opposition knows some of the consultative mechanisms that we have adopted. We have not succeeded. I admit that this is a commitment in our Common Minimum Programme. Now that the Leader of the Opposition also spoke; now that our CPI(M) colleagues also spoke, I will once again make another attempt to evolve a broad-based consensus so that we can move forward on this also. ...*(Interruptions)*

MR. SPEAKER : Do not record anything.

...*(Interruptions)**

MR. SPEAKER : Please keep silence.

DR. MANMOHAN SINGH : Mr. Speaker, Sir, Shri L.K. Advani and some other Members raised the issue of internal security. Advaniji has made some critical remarks about our Government's performance in dealing with terrorism and terrorist groups of different kinds. I have no intention to score points against the Opposition on this issue. National security is too serious a matter for any kind of Political one-upmanship. I would like to assure this House that our commitment in the fight against terrorism is absolute. India has remained in the crosshairs of terrorists for a long time. I do not need to remind this House about a dark day in 2001 when, but for the fact that fate intervened and our vigilant Watch and Ward Staff, our Parliament would have been the scene of a great deal of

*Not recorded

bloodshed. I am not scoring points here against the failure of the NDA Government. I only wish to remind Members that we face a dangerous. ...*(Interruptions)*

MR. SPEAKER : Please sit down. Nothing is being recorded. Why are you saying this? Please keep silence in the House.

DR. MANMOHAN SINGH : I only wish to remind Members that we face a dangerous enemy in terrorism and that we must maintain a constant vigil to prevent terrorists from succeeding in its nefarious designs.

Some hon. Members and Shri L.K. Advani wanted details on the progress made in some of the recent terror attack cases. In the Mumbai blasts, which he referred to, 13 persons have been arrested. In the cinema blast in Ludhiana, ten persons have been apprehended. Arrests have also been made in the Rampur attack on the CRPF camp and in the UP Court blasts.

13.00 hrs.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I can detail many more cases. I can give details of attacks that have been foiled, including one on the RSS headquarters in Nagpur. Our Government is resolute, as indeed any democratic Government should be, in defeating the forces of extremism and terrorism. Our multi-faceted strategy has produced significant results. In Jammu and Kashmir there has been a significant decline in terrorist violence and an upswing in economic and political activities. I wish to state that the battle against terror will be a long drawn out one. We strongly believe in 'zero tolerance' of terror. Some Members have said that we have provided an easy legal regime for terrorists. This lie must be nailed once and for all. Legal regimes do not prevent terror. If that had been the case, there would have been no attack on Akshardham or on the Raghunath Mandir. Draconian laws could not prevent the IC-814 hijack. In fact, the signal that went out in this case was that if the terrorists were determined enough, the Government would merrily succumb to them. We had the shameful sight of the then External Affairs Minister escorting dreaded terrorists to their freedom.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, sabre rattling does not prevent terror. It requires efficient, effective policing and intelligence gathering. The morale of our security agencies is high and we will ensure that they are adequately equipped to meet their challenges. ...*(Interruptions)*

[Translation]

SHRI ANANTH KUMAR : You tell about Afzal. ...*(Interruptions)*

[English]

MR. SPEAKER : Your comment first, he will tell you later.

[English]

DR. MANMOHAN SINGH : Sir, I should say a few words about some matters of foreign policy. Our foreign policy has sought to promote an environment of peace and stability in our region. The challenge before us is to create an external environment that is conducive to our long-term and sustained economic development. We want mutually beneficial relations with all our neighbours, with all major powers and with all our economic patterns. It is with this perspective that we have engaged the world and sought partnerships across the world.

I should say a few words about the Civil Nuclear Energy Cooperation with the USA and other countries. We continue to make efforts to make this possible in a manner in which we can maximise the use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. We are presently engaged in negotiations with the International Atomic Energy Agency for an India-specific safeguards agreement. We also continue to seek the broadest possible consensus within the country to enable the next steps to be taken. I believe that such cooperation is good for us for our energy security and for the world.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I was very happy some days ago that the former National Security Advisor, Shri Brajesh Mishra came out openly in defence of the Nuclear

[Dr. Manmohan Singh]

Cooperation Agreement. Also, Sir, we had seen in this country Mr. Strobe Talbot, who negotiated on this issue with the NDA Government saying that NDA Government was prepared to swallow even 50 per cent of the deal that would be enough. ...*(Interruptions)*

MR. SPEAKER : I will not stop you. At the appropriate time, you can raise the issue.

...*(Interruptions)*

[Translation]

MR. SPEAKER : You may comment. I will not stop you.

...*(Interruptions)*

[English]

MR. SPEAKER : You can do it at the appropriate time.

...*(Interruptions)*

MR. SPEAKER : This will not go on record. Do not take down anything.

...*(Interruptions)**

DR. MANMOHAN SINGH : Mr. Speaker, Sir, I should say a few words about our policies towards our neighbours. Our top priority remains our neighbourhood. We want peace, stability and prosperity in South Asia.

I want to begin by congratulating the people of Pakistan who have shown that, like us, they want to choose the democratic path. I am sure, the House will join me in conveying to them our warmest good wishes as they consolidate democracy in this country. A great daughter of Pakistan had to sacrifice her life in the process. We mourned with profound sadness, the death of Benazir Bhutto. The people of Pakistan have paid their tribute to her memory in their own way.

*Not recorded

Sir, I would like to assure the newly elected leadership in Pakistan that we seek good relations with Pakistan. India want to live in peace with Pakistan. The destinies of our two nations, I have often said, are closely inter-linked. We need to put the past behind us; we need to think about our collective destiny, our collective security and our collective prosperity.

In their first pronouncements after the elections, the leaders of the main political parties in Pakistan have also spoken of their interest in developing close relations and working with us to bring about a durable peace. Indeed, the dialogue that we have resumed with the Government of Pakistan over the last few years was started when the late Benazir Bhutto and Shri Rajiv Gandhi were the Prime Ministers.

The most courageous steps to build peace were taken by Prime Ministers Nawaz Sharief and Atal Bihari Vajpayee. We have continued the process with President Musharraf. I have said before that I have a vision for the future of India and Pakistan. I believe that in both countries, there is a consensus that we must have close and cooperative relations and a framework for enduring peace.

I hope that the newly elected leaders in Pakistan can quickly move forward with us on this. I am sure that this House will want me to say that we would welcome this and meet them half-way.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the hon. Leader of the Opposition said that this Government is a faceless and a directionless Government, that it needs to be determined and decisive. I do not understand the context in which our Government is being decorated with such colourful adjectives. Shri Advaniji also predicted that our Government will not complete its full term. This is not the first time that he had made such predictions; he had been proved wrong. To him, I would like to say.

[Translation]

They can neither lift dagger nor sword, I have fathomed out the strength of these arms.

[English]

MR. SPEAKER : Put it in English for people like us!

DR. MANMOHAN SINGH : Mr. Speaker, Sir, the direction in which we have moved the country in the last four years is well laid out in the Rashtrapati's Address. It is in the direction of inclusive growth; it is in the direction of empowering the poor and marginalized sections of society. It is in the direction of unleashing the enterprise and creativity that is inherent in every citizen of this great country so that she or he can live up to her full potential. It is in the direction of taking everybody along and working to eradicate poverty, ignorance and disease. It is in a direction to enhance our citizens' security. I hope the direction is now clear for all to see.

Of course, I am aware that some Members have been wishing that this Government falls and this has been their wish since the day we came into Office. To their misfortune, and to the good fortune of the nation, this has not happened. But Sir, such fond dreams do not die easily. Therefore, they continue to see visions where none exist.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the future beckons India. I seek from the Leaders of all national Parties a long term vision that will enable us to widen our development options. I seek a commitment to the nation's best long term interests. Let us not divide ourselves by adopting narrow perspectives on important national policies. It is this perspective that informs the President's Address this year. I am, therefore, happy to express my sincere gratitude to Rashtrapati for her Address to Parliament. ...*(Interruptions)*

MR. SPEAKER : It is for the Prime Minister to decide to respond. Since the hon. Leader of the Opposition wants to ask something, I am allowing him to speak.

...*(Interruptions)*

MR. SPEAKER : Please take your seats. If it is possible, you can speak one-by-one.

SHRI L.K. ADVANI (Gandhinagar) : Sir, I am tempted to ask a number of questions on the basis of what has just been said. But I think many issues raised by the Members from the Opposition have not even been touched.

More than that, I think that the comments made about the performance of the NDA Government have been absolutely false and baseless, particularly in respect of farmers, dealing with internal security and containing inflation. You are attributing the success of the NDA Government to a step which never before in all these six-eight years has anyone even suggested. Apart from that, a crucial issue relating to internal security is the question as to how this Government has handled the master mind behind the attack on Parliament. He said not a word about Afzal. Why the Supreme Court's judgement has not been honoured. Therefore, in protest against this speech of the Prime Minister, I would like the Opposition to walk out.

13.13 hrs.

At this stage, Shri L.K. Advani and some other Hon. Members left the House

THE MINISTER OF PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS AND MINISTER OF INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING (SHRI PRIYA RANJAN DASMUNSI) : Sir, it is very unfair that the Leader of the Opposition has run away. When he started by saying that he is tempted to ask, I feel at this age temptation is not good...*(Interruptions)*

[Translation]

MR. SPEAKER : Please take your seats.

...*(Interruptions)*

SHRI ANANT GANGARAM GEETE (Ratnagiri) : Mr. Speaker. Sir, I would like to ask a question to the hon' Prime Minister...*(Interruptions)*

MR. SPEAKER : You may ask. You keep quiet I cannot compel him to reply.

SHRI ANANT GANGARAM GEETE : Mr. Speaker, The cotton growers of Vidarbha in Maharashtra, where suicide caused a countrywide agitation and at last the government was compelled to waive off the loans. For that loan-waiver...*(Interruptions)*

MR. SPEAKER : There will be a discussion on budget, you may speak then.

SHRI ANANT GANGARAM GEETE : Mr. Speaker, Sir, now hon. Prime-Minister is sitting in the House. The cotton grower farmers of Vidarbha are not getting the benefit of loan-waiver package declared. Mr. Speaker, Sir, Shri Vilas Muttemwarji, who is from Vidarbha is also sitting here.

...(Interruptions)*

[English]

MR. SPEAKER : Nothing will be allowed. Nothing to be recorded now.

...(Interruptions)

13.16 hrs.

Shri Anant Gangaram Geete and some Other Hon. Members then left the House

MR. SPEAKER : A number of amendments have been moved by the Members to the Motion of Thanks. Shall I put all the amendments to the vote of the House together or does any hon. Member want any particular amendment to be put separately?

...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER : What can I do if all of you speak together? All of you are speaking together and you expect me to sit here. I would not allow this.

...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER : I shall now put all the amendments together to the vote of the House.

All the amendments were put and negatived.

...(Interruptions)

*Not recorded.

SHRI BASU DEB ACHARIA (Bankura) : Sir, since no assurance has been given on our demands, we are walking out...(Interruptions)

13.16½ hrs.

At this stage, Shri Basu Deb Acharia and some other hon. Members left the House.

MR. SPEAKER : I shall now put the Motion of Thanks on the President's Address to the vote of the House. The question is:

"That an Address be presented to the President in the following terms:—

"That the Members of the Lok Sabha assembled in this Session are deeply grateful to the President for the Address which she has been pleased to deliver to both Houses of Parliament assembled together on February 25, 2008".

The motion was adopted.

[English]

MR. SPEAKER : The House stands adjourned to meet again at 2.00 p.m.

13.17 hrs.

The Lok Sabha then adjourned for Lunch till Fourteen of the Clock.

14.06 hrs.

The Lok Sabha re-assembled after Lunch at six minutes past Fourteen of the Clock.

[MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER in the Chair]