

[Shri Geeta Mukherjee]

for women would rotate and moreover the reservation is supposed to be reviewed after 15 years according to the Joint Committee's recommendation. For capable long-standing established political leaders, there should be no problem in contesting and winning from another constituency nearby. In any case, none of us have come to the politics with the idea that we shall be life-long occupants of our seats as MPs and MLAs.

The necessity of giving reservation has arisen from the fact that despite being 50 per cent of the voters, the representation of women in the decision-making bodies remained insignificant. Has it not also deprived the whole society by not utilizing the talents of women in the highest decision-making fora? Does it not impoverish our democracy to considerable extent?

I again implore my male colleagues here to establish real partnership between men and women in the highest decision-making fora in order to hit out unitedly against the age old discrimination against women and thereby let us help in the establishment of a joint leadership of men and women which can enrich our democracy and advance our society.

We, the women of India, remember with special gratitude the men social reformers who fought valiantly for the improvement of the lot of women in the face of social ostracism and ridicule. Who can forget Raja Rammohan Roy, Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Rabindra Nath Tagore, Subramania Bharati, Jyotiba Phule and so many other illustrious men who will go down in history as some of the greatest benefactors to our society?

My dear male colleagues of this House, please consider the impact.

SHRI SHARAD PAWAR (Baramati) : Why do you not address the whole House?

SHRIMATI GEETA MUKHERJEE : All right, men and women of the whole House, please consider the impact. I know that women are all for it. That is why I addressed like that.

Please consider the impact we can make if in this very Session, we can pass this Bill. If we can do that, it will go down in the history of Indian Parliament as one of the most distinguished Sessions and a memorable contribution in our country's progress towards a fuller and more universal democracy and also advanced society.

So, I implore that we should all join in creating that glory by lending everybody's support and voting for the Bill. Please remember that the women who are 50 per cent of the voters will be watching with anxiety and eagerness what we do about this Bill in this Session and will remember

you with respect and gratitude if this bill gets passed in this very Session.

Therefore, let all of us march together towards that fuller democracy where men and women can together build the nation. So, let this Bill be passed in this very Session !

15.50 hrs.

STATEMENT BY PRIME MINISTER

Fire at Baripada, Orissa

[English]

THE PRIME MINISTER (SHRI H.D. DEVE GOWDA) : Sir, with your kind permission I would like to make the following statement about my visit yesterday to the Orissa State.

I would like to inform the hon. Members about my visit along with Shri Sharad Pawar, the Leader of Congress (I), Shri Karia Munda of the BJP, Shri Biju Patnaik, Shri Anchal Das, Shri Sriballav Panigrahi, Shri Srikant Jena, Kumari Sushila Tiriya, all MPs from various parties. We paid a visit to Baripada yesterday February 24, 1997 the site of the ghastly tragedy by fire which broke out on February 23, 1997.

The facts about the incident are as follows:

About 10,000 devotees had assembled at Madhuban in the Baripada Municipality of Mayurbhanj District, for a religious gathering which began on February 21, 1997 and was to conclude on February 23. On February 23, 1997 a devastating fire suddenly broke out at the site at 3.15 in the afternoon. It has been informed by the State Government that the fire brigade was immediately pressed into service, and while the women's camp site could be protected, the fire spread through the men's camp site and 149 persons died on the spot. Another 175 persons were injured and were admitted to the local hospital and to nursing homes. Of the injured persons, 28 have succumbed to their injuries.

Immediately after the accident, the local administration deployed 43 doctors to attend to the injured. Local voluntary organisations, businessmen and political workers also joined the rescue efforts. A team of medical experts and para-medical staff from the Medical College, Cuttack, has also reached Baripada.

The process of identification of the deceased is on and their relatives and acquaintances are coming for identification.

I would like to inform the hon. Members that the Central Government is going to release rupees 50,000 to the families of the deceased and to those persons who have been disabled permanently. For others who have been injured, the Central Government would provide Rs. 25,000.

The State Government has also announced financial relief of rupees 25,000 to the next of kin of the deceased and rupees 10,000 to each of those injured.

I have also requested the Chief Minister to make efforts to have the deceased identified precisely so that the assistance being given reaches the right persons. Given the difficult situation, the local authorities and the State Government are making the best possible efforts to deal with it.

I have been informed that the State Government has instituted an inquiry into the accident to be conducted by the Divisional Commissioner of the Central Revenue Division, Cuttack to ascertain the sequence of events leading to it and to determine whether prompt steps were taken to control the fire and provide medical care to the victims.

I am sure I speak on behalf of all the hon. Members in expressing deep grief at this sad event, and in expressing condolences to the families of those who have died, and wish for the recovery of the injured.

SHRI SHARAD PAWAR (Baramati) : Mr. Prime Minister, your visit has definitely created a sort of confidence in the minds of the local people. It was a great relief to them. My only request is that whatever financial assistance the Government of India is going to give, has to be released as early as possible.

During the last visit of the hon. Prime Minister to that State at the time of drought, Rs. 50 crore relief had been announced. But the concerned Ministry has not released that money to that State. That is why, it should not happen at this juncture.

SHRI H.D. DEVE GOWDA : The amount has been released not as a special assistance. As I promised, Rs. 50 crore has been released. But they want special assistance. *(Interruptions)*. I will reply tomorrow about what they have released. We have released this amount today itself and I have passed the orders to place the amount at the disposal of the Chief Secretary of the Orissa Government. *(Interruptions)*

SHRI SRIBALLAV PANIGRAHI (Deogarh) : Sir, only Rs. 13 crore has been released by the Government of India. *(Interruptions)*.

MR. CHAIRMAN : Mr. Panigrahi, as you know, after

making a statement we do not have the convention of any clarification.. . . *(Interruptions)*

SHRI PINAKI MISHRA (Puri) : We are a very poor State as it is and on top of that, we are very badly ravaged by natural calamities. That is why, we do not doubt the hon. Prime Minister's intention, but at the cutting edge level his promises are not being fulfilled.

MR. CHAIRMAN : Now, the hon. Prime Minister has said that he has already released Rs. 50 crore.

. . . *(Interruptions)*

MR. CHAIRMAN : I cannot allow you. After making a statement, there is a convention in this House that there is no clarification sought. I cannot allow you.

SHRI SARAT PATTANAYAK (Bolangir) : The hon. Prime Minister should provide maximum funds, especially for providing drinking water. From March onwards we are not going to have a drop of water in Bolangir, Kalahandi, Koraput, Mayabhanj and other parts of the State. So, my humble request to the Prime Minister is that he should provide maximum funds to the State as far as drinking water problem is concerned. *(Interruptions)*

[Translation]

SHRI KRISHAN LAL SHARMA (Outer Delhi) : Mr. Chairman, Sir, I would like to say that a copy of the statement made by hon. Prime Minister should be circulated among Members atleast.

MR. CHAIRMAN : Copy of the statement has been circulated.

SHRI KRISHAN LAL SHARMA : I do not know as to when it was circulated.

MR. CHAIRMAN : I think that it has been circulated.

SHRI KRISHAN LAL SHARMA : We should atleast be informed about the statement made in the House.

MR. CHAIRMAN : The copy of the statement will be given to you but you cannot seek any classification on it.

SHRI KRISHAN LAL SHARMA : At first, I would like to make a submission that amount of compensation is quite meagre and it should be increased.

THE MINISTER OF RAILWAYS (SHRI RAM VILAS PASWAN) : All these points will be dealt in detail in Prime Minister's speech on Presidential Address.

SHRI KRISHAN LAL SHARMA : Secondly, I would like to know about Lapses in management of this crisis which have not been mentioned at all.

[English]

SHRI H.D. DEVE GOWDA : I am prepared to give all the details.

15.58 hrs.

MOTION OF THANKS ON THE
PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS—*Contd.*

[English]

SHRI SOMNATH CHATTERJEE (Bolpur) : Mr. Chairman, Sir, I support the Motion moved by Shri Sharad Yadav.

MR. CHAIRMAN : Do not forget that Bill.

SHRI SOMNATH CHATTERJEE : Before I go into other important issues, I wish to categorically state that I strongly support Comrade Geeta Mukherjee's proposal. I hope that some way will be found out as to how to take up this Bill and to pass it. I had suggested that we should pass it without discussion and I stick to it. *(Interruptions).*

SHRI SOMNATH MOHAN DEV (Silchar) : The Bolpur seat will become a woman's seat.

SHRI SOMNATH CHATTERJEE : If Bolpur seat becomes a woman's seat and if I am still in the reckoning, I will go to Silchar.

15.59 hrs.

[SHRI P.C. CHACKO in the Chair]

Sir, the last year's President's Address was product of what I call the constitutional absurdity, lacking in political and moral authority. We are happy that this year hon. Rashtrapatiiji has been able to read out a speech prepared by a legitimate Government. That is why, the speech reflects the urges and aspirations of the people of this country and addresses some of the basic problems facing the country and the people.

16.00 hrs.

Mr. Chairman, the United Front is not just a combination of political parties born out of political expediency it is the result of a clearest mandate of the people of this country who have, in no uncertain manner, given their mandate against the forces of communalism and sectarianism. Consciously, I believe, that the people of this country did not vote for a single party. But they have made their choice and expressed it in no uncertain manner, in unmistakable form that they have opted for a secular and democratic administration in this country and they want a

Government to be guided by transparency, probity and accountability.

Sir, the coalition government has come to rule this country. I believe that the people of this country realise that one-party rule has not been able to solve the problems of this country when most of the 50 years since our political independence we have had one-party rule. But, Sir, what we find and what is matter of great importance is that 75 per cent of the voters, three out of four voters in this country, in the last election gave their verdict against communalisation of politics. Sir, their mandate is clear and loud. The people's choice for secular, democratic and liberal administration has to be respected and that is why some of the political parties, 13 or 14, have come together to carry out the mandate of the people. It is not a matter to be scoffed at. We have to have a Government in the Centre. We have to provide an administration which will look into the problems of the people, and try to solve them. Therefore, this United Front, which has been born out of the people's choice and the people's mandate, has a very important duty to perform.

Mr. Chairman, Sir, we are told by the major Opposition Party in this country that Government lacks legitimacy because on its own it is not the majority party, that it is supported from outside by the Congress Party which has been ousted from power, and it is supported by the United Front parties not all of whom have joined the Government. Sir, as I said, the clearest decision of people of this country is that the communal forces have to be halted. This country cannot be allowed to be overrun by those who want to divide the country once again, by those who divide the people on the basis of religion, those who have desecrated a place of worship, those who have violated the Supreme Court order and those who have brought into all seeds of discord in the body politic. Sir, as we have to get rid of the economic corruption from our body polity, from our political life, we have also to get rid of this virus of communalism and separatism, from our national life and that is the great obligation which has been imposed on this United Front and it would have been letting the people down ignoring the people's mandate if these political parties who are now in the United Front had not come together to provide an administration which will cater to the needs of the people.

Everybody will realise this that it cannot be a bed of roses for the Government, it cannot be a smooth sailing affair, but they have risen to the occasion and the Common Minimum Programme has been constituted and framed. I believe that even the Congress party has accepted it, which is nothing but, according to me, a testament of hopes, urges and aspirations of the people of this country. It is a charter of comprehensive development of this country