

PRIME MINISTER (DR. MANMOHAN SINGH):

Madam Speaker, I rise to join all Members of this august House in conveying our sincere thanks to Hon. President for his enlightened Address. The debate on the President's Address has been vigorous and wide ranging. I thank all the hon. Members who have contributed to this debate.

Madam, as hon. President mentioned in the initial parts of his Address, our economy has faced a difficult situation in the past one year. Hon. Members are aware that our growth has slowed down and the fiscal deficit has risen. Inflation has been a persistent problem in the last two years. The Current Account Deficit is substantially higher than what we would like it to be. The Finance Minister has dealt with all these issues in his Budget speech, and before that the Economic Survey tabled in this House gave a fairly comprehensive picture of the state of the economy. I would therefore be brief in speaking about the challenges that confront our economy and what we need to do to overcome them.

However, Madam, I do wish to emphatically endorse the view of the Finance Minister that the slow-down in the economy need not persist, and that we are fully capable of putting the country back on a high growth path of 7 to 8 per cent per annum in the next two to three years. To achieve this, we need to increase the rate of investment, especially in infrastructure. Our effort, therefore, will be to raise domestic savings, contain the growth of subsidies and encourage private investment.

While our aim is to achieve an average GDP growth of 8 per cent during the 12th Plan and agricultural growth of 4 per cent, the focus will continue to remain on inclusive growth. Inclusive growth implies not only reducing poverty, but also improving regional equality across and within States, uplift of the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes and minorities, closing gender gaps and generating more and better employment opportunities. Our policies have been designed to fulfill these objectives.

Madam Speaker, I listened with great interest to the speech of the hon. Shri Rajnath Singh ji, and the best I can do is to compare the nine years of UPA rule with the six years of NDA rule so that our country men and women can draw a proper appreciation of what has been done in these nine years.

Madam, first I take the growth of the GDP. If you look at the period of nine years including the current period of slow down, our average growth rate in these nine years will be 7.9 per cent. As against this, the NDA six years yield no more than six per cent.

Madam, it is true that growth in 2012 has slowed down, but nowhere else

this growth profile is in an upward direction. Europe is in recession, the US' growth rate is very low; Japan is stagnating; Brazil's growth rate is less than two per cent, South Africa's growth rate is 2.3 per cent and in the light of the prevailing global situation, our growth rate looks to be impressive even though we are not satisfied with it.

Madam, inclusiveness of the growth process can be judged in many ways. The first and foremost is the concern with the wellbeing of our farmers, what happens to agricultural production and as I said earlier from 2004-05 to 2011-12, that is the UPA period, the growth rate of agricultural production and allied activities was 3.7 per cent. The corresponding growth rate from 1998-99 to 2003-04 of the NDA period was no more than 2.9 per cent. Because agriculture has grown at a faster rate, also because of a number of inclusive policies put in place by our Government, like Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme, the per capita consumption in rural areas during the UPA period is 3.4 per cent. In the NDA period the per capita rural consumption was no more than 0.8 per cent.

I come now to real wages in agriculture. Real wages in agriculture in the Eleventh Plan Period have grown at an average annual rate of 6.8 per cent. In previous decade the growth rate of real wages in agriculture was no more than 1.1 per cent.

Madam, with regard to poverty, in the UPA Period, the poverty declined at an average annual rate of two per cent per annum. In the preceding ten years, the decline was no more than 0.8 per cent.

Madam, we are all concerned about the slow down in industry. But when we compare the nine years' period in which the UPA has been in Government, our industrial growth rate average is 8.5 per cent, the corresponding average for the NDA from 1998-99 to 2003-04 is no more than 5.6 per cent.

With regard to regional inequalities, inter-State growth differential has narrowed and inter-State inequality is not increasing. The so-called BIMARU States have also done much better in the UPA Period than was the case previously.

In terms of education and skill development also the achievements of the UPA are really notable, the key instrument for promoting inclusiveness and empowerment for education, health and skill development. There has been near universal enrolment in primary schools and a steady increase in average number of years pooling of labour for labour force.

The Right to Education Act is a major landmark of the UPA. Madam, with regard to higher education, there has been an unprecedented expansion of central universities. The number has gone up from 17 in 2004-05 to 44. The IITs have gone up from 7 to 16. The IIMs have gone up from 6 to 13.

Indian Institutes of Science, Education and Research have gone up from 1 to 5. Indian Institutes of Information and Technology have gone up from 2 to 4. The result is that the gross enrolment in higher education, which was 12.3 per cent in 2006-07, has gone up to 18 per cent in 2011-12.

With regard to health, Madam, National Rural Health Mission has made a very important start. The Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana is a huge UPA initiative and it provides in-patient cover to 3.4 crores of families. The infant mortality rate has fallen from 58 to 44. The maternal mortality rate has fallen from 254 to 212. The life expectancy at birth was in 2000-01, 62.5 years, and by 2010-11 of this century it has gone up to 66 years. Literacy rate, similarly, has gone up from 64.8 to 74 per cent. The death rate has declined from 8.4 per cent to 7.1 per cent.

Madam, it is not my case that what we have achieved is the optimum level. I do recognise that growth requires efforts and further efforts to boost it – we need to do lot more to promote inclusiveness – that health and education require greater attention, that environment protection measures have to be adopted with greater amount of firmness. But I would respectfully submit to this august House that what has been achieved is not something which can be belittled as Shri Rajnath Singh ji tried to do.

I know that BJP has a particular view towards economic and social policy of the UPA. A few days ago, a conclave of the National Council of BJP assembled in Delhi, used the choicest abuses for the Congress establishment and Congress leadership including myself. It is not my intention to reply them in that language because I do believe that our work and our performance are the best judges of what we have achieved. A poet has said:

“हम को है उनसे वफ़ा की उम्मीद, जो जानते ही नहीं कि वफ़ा क्या है?”

Also, Madam, there is a proverb.

“जो गरजते हैं वो बरसते नहीं।”

We have seen this arrogance not for the first time. The Shining India campaign in 2004 led to disastrous results for the BJP. In 2009, they fielded the iron man Advani ji against the lamb that Manmohan Singh is, and we all know as to what was the result. I am convinced that if the people of India were to look at our record in these nine or ten years, they would repeat what they did in 2004 and 2009.

Madam, several hon. Members have expressed concern about the state of agriculture. I share that concern. Farmers in our country are the most important constituent that the UPA cares for. We have done utmost to give our farmers remunerative prices, and here I make bold to say that the procurement prices of wheat, of rice and other products have been raised in a manner which was never seen ever before in the history of this country. ... (Interruptions)

I share the concern of the hon. Members on the need for focused attention to the agricultural sector. That has been our priority. It will remain our priority. The achievements of our farmers in keeping us self-sufficient in food are indeed extraordinary. They work hard under adverse circumstances and they deserve all possible assistance.

It is for this reason that we have increased the Minimum Support Prices as never before. If you look at these prices across various commodities, they have increased by 50 to 200 per cent since 2004-05. Since the year 2004 we have more than doubled the Minimum Support Prices for wheat and paddy. Credit flow to the agricultural sector has increased since 2003-04 by nearly 500 per cent. The 12th Plan allocation for the sector has been fixed at over twice the size for the 11th Plan.

Madam, it is the result of the hard work of our farmers and our policies that the average annual rate of growth in the agriculture and allied sector which was stagnating at the level of 2.4 per cent and 2.5 per cent during the Ninth and 10th Plans respectively increased to 3.7 per cent during the 11th Plan despite the occurrence of a countrywide drought in 2009.

It is true that the growth of the agricultural sector during 2012-13 is, at present, projected at 1.8 per cent. But the revival of the monsoon during the latter half of the kharif season and improved prospects of rabi due to conducive weather conditions give me hope that the actual growth rate during this year would be higher than the figure that I have mentioned.

To address the issue of shortage of covered storage capacity, the Government had formulated the Private Entrepreneurs Guarantee Scheme in 2008. A capacity of 181 lakh metric tonnes has been sanctioned under this Scheme, of which 43 lakh metric tonnes of capacity has already been created.

Madam, an issue that did not come up significantly in the debate but which I wish to flag is that of water. Shri Devegowda ji, in his own way, referred to this problem. I do agree that we have a national problem in the distribution of water of

the inter-State rivers, and I hope that the country would recognize the great importance of dealing with this problem in a holistic perspective.

The UPA Government recognises the management of water resources as a major challenge. Shrimati Supriya Sule referred to the need to give greater importance to the construction of check dams. We have already decided to modify the Accelerated Irrigation Benefit Programme to make it more effective, and expand the Watershed Development Programme during the 12th Five Year Plan.

Apart from agriculture, urban and industrial water demand also needs to be managed more efficiently. Our ground water resources need to be better preserved. We will be bringing these proposals on a new ground water law and a national water framework law very shortly.

Madam, several hon. Members, cutting across party lines, have expressed concern over incidence of violence against women. This is an issue, which unites all sections of our House; and I sincerely appeal to all sections of the House to speak with one voice. If there are any legislative measures, which we can agree upon, they can be then pushed forward at a much higher speed than is normally done when it comes to legislation through Parliament. I sincerely hope that we will, with one voice, agree to go forward in a manner, which will do justice to 50 per cent of India's population, that is, our women and children.

Let me reiterate to this august House the commitment of our Government to ensuring the dignity, safety and security of every woman of our country. We have adopted a series of measures -- legislative, institutional and procedural -- which reaffirm the collective responsibility of this Government in this direction as more and more women enter public spaces. The Government has been prompt in acting on the recommendation of the Justice Verma Committee, by promulgating an Ordinance amending and strengthening the law to deal with crimes of sexual violence against women. I am happy that 'The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Bill, 2012' was passed by Parliament last week.

We have a number of schemes in place to provide the restorative justice to victims of rape and sexual violence through financial assistance and support services. The National Mission for Empowerment of Women would be implementing 'One Stop Crisis Centre' of providing all necessary services for women victims/survivors of violence at a public hospital in 100 Districts. A new umbrella scheme for protection and empowerment of women and a toll free 24x7 helpline for women as a Central Sector Scheme across India is on the anvil.

The Government's resolve is further reflected in the announcement of the Finance Minister in his Budget Speech that an additional amount of Rs. 200 crore has been allocated to the Ministry of Women and Child Development to address issues of gender discrimination. The Nirbhaya Fund of Rs. 1,000 crore announced by the Finance Minister is further testimony of our Government's solidarity with our girl children and women as we pledge to empower them and keep them safe and secure. However real and effective change in the status of women in our country can come only if there is a change in our societal values. We need to collectively work towards this goal.

Madam Speaker, some Members have stressed the need to implement the Sachar Committee's Report to raise the standard of living of the poor among the minorities. The Sachar Committee submitted its Report in 2006. The Government accepted 72 out of 76 recommendations made by the Committee. The majority of the recommendations can be clubbed under (i) education, (ii) access to credit, (iii) Wakfs and (iv) special development initiatives. I believe that our Government has done good work in each of these areas.... (Interruptions) The Ministry of Minority Affairs today implements three scholarship and one fellowship schemes for minorities. ... (Interruptions) During the Eleventh Plan period, more than one crore students benefitted from these schemes...(Interruptions)

In the year 2012-13, nearly 15 per cent of the total priority sector lending has been availed of by the minority communities. In addition, the National Minorities Development and Finance Corporation has disbursed credit totalling over Rs.1,100 crore to nearly five lakh Muslim beneficiaries. The Wakf (Amendment) Bill, 2010 has been approved by the Cabinet and will be introduced during the current Session of Parliament. I am also happy to inform the House that contours of a National Wakf Development Corporation will be finalised in the near future. The Multi-sectoral Development Programme to provide basic amenities was launched in 90 identified backward minority concentration districts and is now being modified to focus at the block level. An amount of Rs.3, 400 crore has been released to State Governments on this account up to February 2013.... (Interruptions) Besides this, relevant social sector Ministries have been mandated to provide at least 15 per cent of the outlays for the development of minorities under the Prime Minister's 15-Point Programme.

Madam, good governance is a sine qua non for the benefits of the programmes of the Government to be realised by our people. Towards this end, I would like to reiterate our commitment to ushering in reforms for greater transparency, probity, integrity and accountability in governance. We are committed to the enactment of the legislations proposed in this regard, particularly the Lokpal Bill, the Whistle Blower's Protection Bill and the Prevention of Bribery of Foreign Public Officials and Officials of Public International

Organisations Bill, which already stand introduced in the Parliament. I would seek the cooperation of all Members of the House for the expeditious passage of these pending Bills.

Madam Speaker, Shri Mulayam Singh Yadav raised the issue of corruption in the implementation of MGNREGA Scheme and suggested its discontinuation. I would like to mention that the Scheme, which is implemented through the State Governments, provides a safety net to a very large number of rural families in times of distress. Our Government has taken several measures to ensure transparency and accountability in the implementation of this Scheme. The measures undertaken include social audits through Gram Sabhas, placement of information on critical parameters in the public domain, disbursement of wages through banks and post offices, audit by Chartered Accountants at the Gram Panchayat level, formulation of standard operating procedures for redress of complaints and issue of guidelines for State Level Vigilance and Monitoring Committees. The States have been asked to set up an Ombudsman for redress of grievances under the Scheme in districts.

The Government is also considering the setting up of a concurrent evaluation office to evaluate the performance of various rural development schemes, including MGNREGA with a view to enable mid-course corrections. We are committed to working with States to ensure the highest level of transparency and accountability of this significant scheme.

Madam, since the UPA came to power in 2004, we have sought, to the extent possible, to encourage and create an international environment conducive to our primary task of transforming India. In this quest, we have utilised the opportunities that existed to further India's interests by obtaining the removal of restraint and sanction regime on India, encouraging international investment in India's development, and building cooperative and peaceful relations with other powers.

I can say with certainty that our standing in the world and our ability to pursue our interests has gone up in the last nine years. There is greater international understanding now of our challenges such as terrorism and there is a growing international acceptance of India's rightful place in the global political, economic and security architecture, including the United Nations Security Council.

We have safeguarded our interests in global negotiations on such vital issues as trade and climate change. We have increased our access to markets, capital, energy, minerals and advanced technology. When faced with challenges such as the international financial and economic crisis, we have successfully mitigated its effects on India to a considerable extent. We have safeguarded our interests in

global negotiations on such vital issues as trade and climate change. We have increased our access to markets, capital, energy, minerals and advanced technology.

Madam, Members have raised the issue of human rights violations during the conflict in Sri Lanka and the lack of progress on reconciliation, accountability and political devolution in Sri Lanka. The Government takes the sentiments expressed by Members very seriously. We are firmly of the view that issues of reconciliation and political devolution in Sri Lanka need to be addressed with a sense of urgency.

We have consistently called upon the Government of Sri Lanka to fulfil its public commitments for the implementation of the 13th Amendment and for building further on it so as to achieve a meaningful political settlement. We have also urged that elections to the Northern Provincial Council be held at the earliest and have called for effective and time-bound implementation of the constructive recommendations contained in the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission report. This was also the message, Madam, I conveyed to President Rajapaksa during his visit to India in September 2012. We will continue to remain engaged with the Government of Sri Lanka to implement these steps and take forward the process of reconciliation and settlement.

As regards the issue of a draft resolution expected to be Tabled by the United States at the forthcoming Session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, our decision will depend on the substance of the final text Tabled in the Council. We will, however, be guided by our consistent position that we support proposals that seek to advance the achievement of a future for the Tamil community in Sri Lanka that is marked by equality, dignity, justice and self respect.

I wish to assure the House that our Government will remain engaged with the Government of Sri Lanka to promote a durable settlement of the Tamil problem that enables the Tamil citizens of Sri Lanka to lead a life of dignity and self-respect with equal rights. I also assure the Members that we will remain engaged with the Government of Sri Lanka with regard to the welfare, safety and security of our fishermen to ensure that fishermen on both sides can continue to pursue their livelihood in a safe, secure and sustainable manner.

I would also like to respond to the concerns raised by some Members on China. At the outset, I wish to underline that India and China are two large neighbouring countries with a long history of civilisational interaction. In my view, there is enough space in the world today for both countries to achieve their developmental aspirations. While we do have differences over the border issue,

since 1988 we have evolved mechanisms to address the issue and to maintain peace and tranquillity on the border. Having agreed to guiding principles and political parameters for a boundary settlement, with Premier Wen Jiabao in 2005, today our special representatives are discussing a framework for settlement of the boundary. Members will understand that this is a complex and sensitive issue and that its resolution could take time. Pending a settlement, both sides are committed to maintain the status quo and peace and tranquillity in the border areas.

Last year, our two countries established a new mechanism to ensure this. We had also agreed that differences on the boundary question should not come in the way of mutually beneficial cooperation. We will continue to manage our overall relations with China with maturity, recognising opportunities for common development and convergence of interests with China on many regional and global issues. The new leaders of China have conveyed to me their desire to strengthen our strategic communication and to forge a better future for our relations. This is also the goal of our Government. We should engage the new China confidently and constructively in a spirit of national consensus.

Madam, some hon. Members mentioned China's dam-building activity on the upper reaches of the Brahmaputra. We can and we do use diplomatic engagement and dialogue to ensure that these activities, which are taking place on Chinese territory, do not, in any way, harm the livelihood of our people and our ecology. We have raised these concerns with China at every level and, as a result, have begun dialogue and cooperation with China on trans-border rivers. Upon recent reports about new dams being planned on the upper reaches of the Brahmaputra, China officially assured us that these are run-of-the-river projects and will not result in water storage. We will also continue to assure ourselves in this regard, using our own means. I assure hon. Members that we remain vigilant about all developments in India's periphery or elsewhere that could affect our security, unity and territorial integrity, and we will take all necessary measures to respond to them.

Madam, concern has been expressed in the House about the situation in Maldives. India has always stood for a stable, prosperous and democratic Maldives. As a close and friendly neighbour, India remains concerned about the ongoing political instability in Maldives since the transfer of power in February, 2012. We are closely engaged with all political forces and stakeholders in Maldives and encourage them to resolve their issues through dialogue. Madam, it is our hope that Maldives will have free, fair and inclusive elections in September to elect the new President. The Election Commission of Maldives has announced that Presidential Elections would be held in September 2013. India will support all efforts to ensure a free, fair, credible and inclusive Presidential

election that can contribute to durable peace, stability and prosperity in the Maldives. We will continue to monitor the situation and take all necessary measures to strengthen our relations with and to protect our interests in Maldives.

Madam Speaker, our dialogue with Pakistan continues in order to normalize our relations: promote bilateral cooperation and people-to-people contacts; and resolve outstanding issues. Progress has been possible in some areas like trade and people-to-people contacts. But, incidents such as the barbaric manner in which two Indian soldiers were killed on the Line of Control (LoC) in January 2013 vitiate the atmosphere and cast a shadow on the bilateral dialogue process. Further, we are yet to see tangible progress in dismantling the terrorism infrastructure in Pakistan and in bringing to justice the perpetrators of the Mumbai terror attack of November 2008. Normal, good-neighbourly relations between India and Pakistan -- free from the threat of violence, and enhanced bilateral economic cooperation -- would be in our mutual interest. We also expect Pakistan to take steps to create a conducive environment to take the process of normalization forward.

We have an abiding interest in a stable, strong, united, democratic and prosperous Afghanistan, which is no longer a safe haven for terrorism. As Afghanistan undergoes political, economic and security transitions in 2014 and beyond, we will continue to help build Afghan capabilities to evolve peacefully and fight terrorism and extremism.

Madam Speaker, hon. Members have also raised a number of State and sector-specific issues during the debate. While I am not going into these issues for want of time, I would like to assure you that we have taken note of them. I am advising my colleagues to make sincere efforts to address them to the satisfaction of the hon. Members.

With these words, Madam, I once again join Members in thanking the hon. President for his insightful Address, which I commend for adoption with acclamation.
