

## VALEDICTORY REMARKS ON THE CONCLUSION OF THE SESSION

**MR. CHAIRMAN: Hon'ble Members !** The first session of the year of this august House and the important two part Budget session is coming to a close today. I am pained to note that it turned out to be an eminently forgettable one on account of utter disregard of the mandate of this important parliamentary institution and its responsibilities and missed opportunities.

While it is customary for the Chairman on this day to give a brief account of what has been done and delivered by the House, today, I am compelled to reflect on what could not be done during such an important session, which is the longest of the year with about 30 working days. This is a sad commentary on the functioning of our parliamentary institutions reiterating the perception that they are on the decline.

Let me now recount what the House was required to do and did not in the end. You were to discuss the important General Budget for this financial year and consider and return to the other House, the Appropriation bill and the Finance Bill. It was not done. This important function, in the end, was deemed to have been done. No legislative work transacted except passing of the Payment of Gratuity (Amendment) Bill, 2018 and that too without any discussion even as several important Bills awaited your consideration. The Hon'ble Supreme Court's recent verdict on the Act regarding prevention of atrocities against the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes resulted in a certain public perception leading to agitations and even violence in some parts of the country. You did not discuss it even. Proven weaknesses in the management and monitoring of public sector banks led to widespread concern across the country. But you had different priorities and no time to discuss it. Hon'ble Members from Andhra

Pradesh and Tamil Nadu felt strongly on some issues of concern to these States. Even they were not discussed. This list can go on but I do not venture to dwell at length for the sake of brevity.

Hon'ble Members and the leaders are aware that I have admitted discussion on all the issues of concern to various section of the house. It is beyond my comprehension as to why the house could not take up any of those issues which were of larger public concern.

A total of over 124 hours of precious time of this House has been lost due to disruptions as against only 45 hours of functioning.

Hon'ble Members, at the end of such a long session, what is that we can show to the people of our country as our contribution towards addressing their concerns and furthering their genuine aspirations? I am afraid nothing. As a result, we are all the losers. This includes the opposition, the ruling party, the Government and most importantly, the people and the nation. All of you need to now reflect on how we together end up in such a loose-loose situation when it could have been a win-win situation. It is time to wake up and look at the way forward.

All that you did substantially was to discuss and adopt the Motion of Thanks to the President for his address to members of both the Houses at the start of this session and the Union Budget 2018-19. Even laying of Papers, meant for the information of Members was not allowed without disturbance. The best performance of this crucial session during the 22 day second part was the three hour 37 minutes

farewell to the retiring members on the 28<sup>th</sup> of last month. Even that did not come about smoothly as the farewell observations scheduled a day earlier were also not allowed. This House could have been more discreet and considerate while allowing such basic courtesies to a large number of retiring members. Even that had to be negotiated.

Hon'ble Members !

This august House is a Council of States providing for articulation of concerns of the constituent States. This is a primary source of the business agenda for the consideration of the House. But the House also has legislative and deliberative functions which are also important drivers of the agenda of the House. Deliberative function of the House includes taking up issues of larger public importance as well. This House of Elders is required to synthesise all these agendas so that a national agenda and a national perspective is evolved. We had

all the time in the world to discuss all such agenda but we did not do it. Instead of integrating all such concerns and discuss them one after the other, we worked at cross purposes. In the process, we let down the nation, the States and the people.

I am disturbed to note a total breakdown in communication among various sections of the House that was at the root of the prolonged stalemate that ruined this important session. This is not good for our Parliamentary democracy, of which our country has come to acquire a of place pride. Our country had won the battle for self-governance after a long freedom struggle. We are supposed to have matured after about seven decades our brave experiments with parliamentary democracy and self governance. But the functioning of our legislatures do not seem to be assuring enough. This House of Elders needs to lead by example in strengthening the parliamentary

democracy and sustaining the trust and confidence of the people in it.

This takes me to the days of intense debate in the Constituent Assembly over the need and justification for a second chamber, that is, the Council of States. The opinion was divided against and in favour of such a chamber before bicameralism was adopted and this House finally came into being in 1952. I am afraid that the fears expressed about the need of this House at that time are now revisiting us and even coming true. For the benefit of a large number of new Members who took Oath in the last couple of days, let me briefly recall what was said about this House then.

During the Constituent Assembly debates on the need for a Council of States, some members feared that it would prove to be a 'clog in the wheel of progress' involving expenses and not making much contribution. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, who headed

the Union Constitution Committee for reporting on the structure and function of the future legislature of our country had feared in 1936 that a Second Chamber (Council of States) will check any forward tendencies of the Lower House and will be reactionary. Are we making Nehru's worst fears come true? We should not for the sake of our parliamentary democracy and the people.

On balance of considerations after detailed debate, it was finally decided to have this Second Chamber. The advocates of this Chamber had some lofty ideals to be served by it. Late Shri Ananthasayanam Ayyangar asserted that "It is necessary to have another House where the genius of the people may have full play. Whatever hasty legislation is passed by the Lower House may be checkmated by the go slow movement of the Upper House".



Another veteran late Shri Gopaldaswamy Ayyangar said during the debate in the Constituent Assembly on the Report of the Union Constitution Committee that “The most that we expect the Second Chamber to do is perhaps to hold dignified debates on important issues and to delay legislation which might be the outcome of the passions of the moment until the passions have subsided.”

The first Vice President of India and the first Chairman of this august House late Dr.Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan said on 13 May, 1952 that the justification for this House depends on the contributions of the members in respect of the legislative and deliberative functions. Addressing the members after being felicitated, he said “So, it is a test to which we are submitted. We are for the first time starting under the parliamentary system, with a second Chamber in the Centre and we should try to

do everything in our power to justify to the public of this country that a Second Chamber is essential to prevent hasty legislation. We should discuss with dispassion and detachment proposals put before us.”

Hon’ble Members !

Are we letting the genius of this august House express itself? Where are the dignified debates that were envisaged? Are we conducting ourselves in a manner that political passions clouding a legislation are allowed to cool down? Are we demonstrating dispassion and detachment?

This august House was envisaged to enable a reasoned and quiet consideration of Bills by checking hasty legislation by the other House by slowing it at the best. But what is on show is total obstruction of legislation and disregard of issues of public concern. Let us not be a party to this House becoming a ‘clog in the wheel of progress’. You should instead dispel

fears expressed by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, who despite reservations about the utility of this House supported its coming into being. You need to rise to the expectations of those who strongly justified the need for this House in the Constituent Assembly.

The main purpose behind the creation of a legislative structure for our country was to provide a democratic forum for people's representatives and to restore the political and social unity of our country.

It is in the hands of the Hon'ble Members to choose whether to do justice to the lofty ideals with which this Chamber was created or to strengthen the fears of those who had reservations about its utility. In my view, the best way forward is to 'debate and decide' instead of 'disrupt and derail'. Demonstrate your wisdom and concern and not placards in the House.

Every individual and institution needs to seriously reflect and introspect from time to time, failing which they degenerate and decline. We have huge stakes in our parliamentary institutions. Let us make a success of them. I earnestly hope that all the Hon'ble Members would appreciate my anguish over the way this important session turned out to be. Hope is what sustains all of us and let us hope for the better when we all meet next time.

I thank the Deputy Chairman, the Members on the Panel of Vice-Chairmen, the Secretary General and the officers and staff of the Secretariat for their help and cooperation.

The National Song, ("*Vande Mataram*" to be played.)

**MR. CHAIRMAN** : The House stands adjourned sine die.

\*\*\*\*\*