

Following is the edited text of the intervention of CPI(M) leader in Rajya Sabha, Sitaram Yechury in the debate on “Motion of Thanks” to the President of India for his address to the joint session of the Parliament on June 10, 2014

I rise to associate myself, as is the norm, as are our constitutional scheme of things, with the Motion of Thanks to the president's address. But, this does not mean and is never meant that we agree with the content of that address. While being deeply grateful, as the motion suggests, to the President of India for delivering the address, we would like to express our concerns which I consider are very, very important to understand actually the electoral mandate and what the people of our country are expecting. Therefore, I must confess that I begin with a sense of confusion at the moment. Having heard the hon. Leader of the House just now, a dear friend and colleague with whom we have served when he was the Leader of the Opposition and the hon. Leader of the Opposition with whom I worked here when he was a hon. Minister and even earlier, now when both of them speak, I only recollect what Winston Churchill once said after the Second World War when he lost elections in England. He was surprised when he lost the elections. He said, that the only lesson that he learnt from this is that you have to show “magnanimity in victory and humility in defeat.” That unfortunately is what has not really emerged here. I am actually pained. That neither humility nor magnanimity has been expressed is a slight digression. I appeal to the House to take it with a sense of humour and not misunderstand me. There is a very popular film that came out of

Hollywood, not a Bollywood film, called Hangover. I didn't understand what was the hangover in politics till now. Now, I do understand. The elections are over, Sir. We have settled our scores. Sir, the pointed issue is what the hon. President has now outlined, what he thought or what we all consider it to be the blueprint for the future. Since we are talking of that, I think, since elections are over, the votes have been cast, let us actually begin this exercise of what needs to happen in future. The new Government has come and assumed office. We only wish it well. We want it to serve the expectations of the people. But, the President's Address somehow does not evoke that sense of confidence that these are matters that are being addressed with the gravity and seriousness that they should be addressed with. Why do I say this, Sir? Firstly, this Address is a compilation of all the election slogans that emerged during the campaign.

It is an easy reckoner, so to speak, like the guide books we have in our schools. You can also rehash the Election Manifesto of the Party that won the election. That is also perfectly permissible, but then, how are you going to achieve what has been promised? That is what is expected, and, there, I think, it has been a very, very dismal failure. The blueprint is not there neither the prioritization is. We may have said what we have said in 2009 about their (UPA-2) 100 days' agenda. But, there was a prioritization. They said that 'we will do this'. They did not do that. They paid the price. But, today, in this Speech, Sir, there are no prioritizations. It is just only a declaration of intent. However noble the intent may be, however valid the intent may be, the country wants to know how do you proceed in achieving it, what is the road map, what is the

blueprint; and that is not available here. The slogans that are repeated here is one of 'good governance' and one of 'development'. The Leader of the House, then as the Leader of the Opposition, we were both together in shouting in denouncing what was called the 'Ordinance Raj'; we both opposed that on earlier occasions. Now, the first thing this Government does is to issue Ordinances, when the Parliament is meeting a week later, and start governing through Ordinances, and on what issue? Okay, when we come to that, we would discuss the merit of it. It is for appointment of officers of the Government. The point is, it sounds very ominous on how the beginning has happened. The moot point here is the question of development. The President of India also refers to this. In fact, he says this in paragraph 4, "This has been an election of Hope", which is true. It has been an election of hope. When I and the hon. Leader of the House both passed out of our higher secondary, and when we were looking for our future education, we only had the Delhi University before us. Both of us joined the Delhi University, different colleges, of course. But we went there. Today, when my youngest son passed out of the higher secondary, he has got 16 institutions in front of him to choose from, in the same city. Now, there has been growth; there has been development; there has been an expansion of opportunities. But the hopes that this generated amongst the youngsters have to be fulfilled. That is the moot question. How are you going to fulfill that? '*Yeh Dil Maange More*' is the slogan that has been used, but how are you going to fulfill that expectation from the people, and for that, I think, you have to consider the existing realities which, I am afraid, have not come into consideration. I am saying this because if we go by the first section of what the hon. President has said

from paragraphs 1, 4, 5, 7, and then in paragraph 7 it is actually a little moving, I quote, Sir, “ Poverty has no religion, hunger has no creed, and despair has no geography. The greatest challenge before us is to end the curse of poverty in India. My Government will not be satisfied with mere “poverty alleviation”, and commits itself to the goal of “poverty elimination”. Very poetic and very noble. But, then, Sir, what is the actual reality in our country today? The actual reality in our country today, according to the Planning Commission’s Tendulkar Committee’s Report, 38 per cent of our population is below the poverty line. Very maligned, highly debated statistics that are involved in it. But, on this, there is no doubt, that the poverty numbers are huge. Now, mere declaration of intent is not enough. How are you going to eliminate this poverty? What are the specific methods in which you are going to tackle it, and how is the beginning going to be made? We are not saying that you can do everything now. But, how are you going to make this beginning?

This is something which I can't *find even* with a microscopic eye it in this Speech. You talked about inequalities. What is the reality? I remember saying here, from the same place, and, I can remind both of them, that in the last occasion when we were moving a Motion for Thanks, I said, 'the two of you may change your places, but I will remain here.' And I am still here. And we will continue with our *critique*, and which I think is in the country's and people's interest. What is that *critique*? The net worth of India's billionaires in the last fifteen years has grown 12-fold. There are 59 billionaires in our country. I have nothing against them. Please, may their tribe increase. But the point is that these 59 individuals

have an asset value that is equal to nearly between one-third and one-half of my country's GDP. Then you have 80 crores, 800 million, of our people today who cannot survive on more than twenty rupees a day. This is the two 'Indias' that we have been making. If poverty has to be eliminated, this gap of growing inequality has to be bridged. We have one of the highest gini coefficient in the world today of income inequality. If this is the case, how are we going to actually address this issue? Yes, that is not possible without a higher growth rate, without the higher growth of employment. Every one of us knows that. But how are we going to achieve that? In order to achieve that, you have not really substantively spoken of anything in this Address. The other concern that has been at the outset referred to is the question of inflation. The hon. Leader of the House has just now spoken about the rate of inflation being high and the rate of growth being low. Now how is this inflation going to be tackled? Not a word in this entire Address on how this inflation is to be tackled. We maintain that one of the major causes for this inflation is the permission given for speculative trading in essential commodities. Unless you ban that for some period of time, it is not possible to contain inflation. Secondly, there is no blueprint, roadmap to suggest that that is even being considered. You have this huge stock of foodgrains with you. Why are you not releasing those foodgrains to the Public Distribution System at the BPL rates to the States? Allow that to reach the market and this will dampen your inflation. No, that is not being done. On the contrary, the first act that happens when this Government comes into office is a further hike in the price of diesel which will increase the transportation costs, and, therefore, trigger off further inflation. So, what are the signals

that are being sent? This is where I think there is a lot of concern on how we are going to tackle this problem.

Yes, we all have congratulated our people, we have congratulated our Election Commission, we have congratulated the youth who have voted. The President of India actually says that youth is the driving force today in our country, is the largest section of our population. In fact, he says, 'my Government will strive to transition from youth development to youth-led development.' Now how will this youth-led development happen, Sir? If you provide our youth with health, with education and with employment, a better India will be built by them. All of us need not debate here any future policies. I have that confidence in our youth, all of us have that confidence in your youth. But give them the wherewithal. What is the state of affairs as far as the wherewithal is concerned? I will just read out one passage from what Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen has written recently in *New York Times*.

I quote, "India has elite schools of varying degrees of excellence for the privileged, but among all Indians, seven or older, nearly one in every five males and one in every three females are illiterate. And most schools are of low quality; less than half the children can divide 20 by 5, even after four years of schooling. India may be the world's largest producer of generic medicine, but its healthcare system is an unregulated mess. The poor have to rely on low-quality -- and sometimes exploitative -- private medical care, because there isn't enough decent public care." Now, with this situation, what is that empowering of youth, which we are doing? And, what is the employment situation? The latest National Sample Survey informs us that the growth rate of employment between 2005 and 2010 is 0.7

per cent. This is the rate of employment growth. Our youth, today, is the backbone of our population, of our society, the demographic dividend that we have. This is the state of their education; this is the state of their health. Our former prime minister had to bemoan, saying that this was a national shame that the children's malnutrition in our country continues to remain at a very, very high level. If this situation cannot be changed, what are all these hopes about? And, this situation has to be changed, not through the slogans of high-speed trains or hundred new cities. Wonderful, if you can have all of them. But please remember that the civilizational advance informs you that cities develop not because you wish them to develop, but cities develop because of economic development. It is not that the economic development will happen because you build cities. Unless there is economic development, no cities can be built. We have had Muhammad Bin Tuglaq. All of us know that history. I hope these hundred cities do not end up in that sort of example. And, we also know what happened to *Badshah* Akbar's Fatehpur Sikri. We are all aware of that. So, building cities is not the answer. The answer is economic development that leads to the development of cities. But you are putting the cart before the horse.

You are now talking of great investments will lead to growth. You talk about greater investments in terms of the FDI. The paragraph 40 of President's Address talks about liberalized FDI in the defence production. Now, the FDI coming into India, according to us, must always be based on three conditions that are beneficial to my country -- (a) The FDI must expand my productive capacities; (b) The FDI must increase employment generation; and (c) the FDI must upgrade India technologically. If these three conditions are not fulfilled, then FDI is

not in India's interest, not in the interest of its people. What is this FDI in Defence production? That, in addition, also creates problems for our security concerns. I remember my friends in the Congress, who are now in the Opposition, used to chide me saying that I support 100 per cent FDI in telecom sector in China, but why I was opposing that in India. China is allowing 100 % FDI in telecom in hardware production. Why is it that everyone of us today is having a cell phone that is made in China? Why are those cell phones not made in India? Now, they are slowly coming. But why did we not allow them in hardware production? Why did we do it in telecom services? We allow them in services, which is profit-generating! All telecom services provided in China are by the public sector. But here all services are by the private sector. Hardware production is imported. What is this FDI policy? Mere appeasement of foreign investors? Is it going to benefit us? You talk of infrastructural development. You talk of agriculture. For all that, we require resources. The question is, how do you marshal these resources?

There is not one word in this entire speech on from where do you marshal these resources from. Last year, the default in direct tax collections, according to the Department concerned, was Rs.5.1 lakh crores. That is a straightforward pilferage. That is what the official record is. This is in addition to the tax forgone which comes to Rs. 5.73 lakh crores. Okay, half of this may be disputed. There may be legal litigations. But even half of that plus this Rs.5.1 lakh crores comes to more than Rs.7 lakh crores. If you collect and use that for public investments, agricultural infrastructure, rural infrastructure, urban infrastructure, all this can be

addressed and you can also provide crores of new jobs for our youths who are today wanting it. And, Sir, the tax foregone last year was Rs. 53,000 crores more than the entire fiscal deficit. Fiscal deficit was Rs.5.2 lakh crores and tax foregone was Rs. 5.73 lakh crores. If these policies are not reversed and if there is no indication that they are going to be reversed, there is nothing of this “hope” that will be realized. Then, it will be the same story five years later when positions may be switched, when you say that people's hopes have been betrayed and you have not lived up to your promises. That is why, unless you seriously address yourself to these issues, forget who will win who will lose. I am talking of my own country, our own youth, their own future and their own aspirations of converting our demographic dividend as an asset. That is where, Sir, I think, there is a very serious drawback in this Address, which needs to be addressed by the Government in the future. There is no point saying that because of me so and so thing happened and because of you that so and so has not happened. Ten years ago when I entered this House say I was 50 years old. Now I am 60 years old, a senior citizen. You can't say that because of the Rajya Sabha I have become 10 years older. I would have aged anyway, Sir. So, the country would have progressed in any way. But you go on saying that yes, that happened because of me and this did not happen because of you. The point at issue is how you are going to address. What is the direction? I am sorry I have to say this. There is a very, very serious lacunae and a drawback in this president's address.

Coming to the other issue, cooperative federalism, much has been talked about it. All of us have the

experience of being in State Governments. We have all talked about it. But, federalism in our country can never be strengthened unless you have an equitable distribution of finances between the Centre and the States. You have the Finance Commission that has not once till date since independence allocated even one-third of the Central tax collections to the States put together. Today, it is about 27 or 28 per cent. At the time of independence, we promised 50 per cent -- 50 per cent for the States and 50 per cent for the Centre. But that has never happened. If you are talking of cooperative federalism, are you prepared for constitutional amendment to come and say that 50 per cent of the Central tax revenue will be shared with the States? If you are not prepared for that, then all this is a hollow slogan. This does not mean anything. Elections are over. So sound bites are no longer necessary.

Then, I come to the issue of terrorism. You talked of zero tolerance to terrorism in para 39. But, then, what has been happening since the election results have come, Sir. Since the election results have come, you have had a spate of growth in communal violence all across the country. You have seen in Karnataka, you have seen in Pune how a technical person was killed. Mr. Sharad Pawar was only telling me a little earlier that in the State of Maharashtra 22 communal riots have taken place during the last three, four days.

Now, all this just brings to mind the fact that in India, terrorism knows no religion, knows no areas, no bounds, no regions. Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated by a Hindu fanatic; Indira Gandhi was assassinated by a Sikh fanatic; and Rajiv Gandhi

was assassinated by a fanatic of the Sri-Lankan LTTE variety. So, 'who the culprit is' is something that goes beyond any religion. Is there any assurance on the issue of thousands of youth who are illegally-detained because of no fault of theirs, because they are routinely-picked up, because they belong to a particular religion on charges of a terrorist attack? There is not one assurance that wrongly-detained Muslim youth who have nothing to categorically prove against them on not even one issue will be released. And then you have all such statements that come which give very contrary signals. The Minister of Minority Affairs, in her statement said, 'Muslims are not a minority in our country.' She is saying that 'Reservation for Muslims kills the competitive spirit.' The question of providing some relief to the Muslim minority came not because of their numbers. It came because of their economic and social status which was brought out by the Sachar Committee Report. That is why the Justice Ranganath Mishra Report talked in terms of reservations for Muslims within the OBCs. But none of those issues is reflected here but what we have is a very passionate reference to article 370 which comes in para 20, and, on that issue, there can be no dispute, that our brothers/sisters, Kashmiri Pandits, who have been displaced internally in their own country should get back a sense of their belonging, should get back to these areas. There is no dispute on it. But then what is being talked of? It is said that special efforts will be made for their return for a settlement in Kashmir. This is very ominous. It just reminds us of the Jewish settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories. What are the settlements that you are talking of? And, it has a very ominous trend indicator if that is the sort of trends that you are

talking of, because on the entire foreign policy issue, the traditional statement expressing solidarity of India with the Palestinian's liberation is completely missing. So, this Israeli inspiration to deal with this problem is something that goes completely against the very concept of what India is all about or the idea of India.

When you come to the final stages of this Address, there is a reference to India being a soft power. I am talking of para 48. I quote, 'To fully realize our soft power potential ...' So far, the criticism that I have heard for the last ten years in this House when they were in the Opposition was that India is a soft State under the former Government, that because we were a soft State, we were not able to handle cross-broader terrorism etc. Today, you are talking of a soft power potential. What does that mean?

Yes, improving relations with everybody is absolutely correct. We should do that in our interest; but remember that the chairman of this House, as the vice-president of India, went to attend the swearing-in of the President of Maldives on his election. The then hon. Prime Minister was invited for Nawaz Sharif's swearing-in ceremony and he couldn't go for some other reason but he deputed a Minister of his, of the Government of India, who attended it. These have been happening. It is not that it has suddenly sprung up only with the election of this Government. The SAARC cooperation was on, it is going on. It is good that we are continuing it. I am very happy about it. But then let's not begin with this idea that the world has been created with me. Then we will only end with the idea like Charles XVI who said, 'After me, the deluge!'

If you begin with the idea that the world has been

created with me, you will only end with 'after me the deluge', and that would be disastrous for our country. Therefore, please remember, when we talk, as the hon. President talks, of "our rich spiritual, cultural, philosophical heritage", that is the idea of India.

The idea of India, the "rich spiritual, cultural, philosophical heritage", is the all-inclusive idea of India. That inclusive idea of India is both on economic matters and on matters of identity.

Talking of economic matters, you cannot solve the problem of unemployment by giving, like what you said in your election manifesto, the right to employers to 'hire and fire', or like the BJP Government in Rajasthan has implemented in that State, as media reports suggest. What about the rights of the working people? Where is the working class in this entire speech? Where is the agricultural labourer in this entire speech? Where is the national law for agricultural labourers in this entire speech? They create our wealth, Sir. All of us are here on the basis of the wealth that is created by these working people. There is not one mention of them. What is this inclusive India that we are talking about? That is why, I think there is something very serious in this entire outlook. If we are talking of the rich cultural and philosophical heritage, then we must remember that. In the city, Srinagar, there is a small palace which has now been restored. That is the famous Pari Mahal, where Dara Shikoh drew his inspiration for his famous treatise which was titled as *Majma ul Bahrain* -- the mingling of two oceans. He was talking of Vedanta and Islamic Sufism, of how this syncretic culture evolved in our country. As we learnt, Swami Vivekananda said, different rivers

flow in different directions but merge finally in the same waters of the ocean. How all of them come and converge into a syncretic civilisational ethos is India, Sir.

Now, that cannot be done through an exclusivist viewpoint on any aspect at all. While we are talking of a rich diversity, I keep recollecting Firaq Gorakhpuri. Firaq saab, as all of us know, was born a high-caste Hindu, named Raghupati Sahay. He taught English; he was a Professor of English in the Allahabad University. He wrote admirable Urdu poetry. One day, there was a very bad communal atmosphere in our country but there was a *shero shayari* going on in Allahabad and he was asked to join. He was told, 'how can it be that we are having a *shero shayari* in your city and you are not participating?' He said, 'No, the atmosphere in the country is bad; I do not want to say anything today. This is not the time for your sort of poetry.' People insisted and he spoke just two lines "*Hasil o husno ye ishk bas itna, aadmi aadmi ko pehechane.*"

There is no India if we don't recognize the other person irrespective of religion, caste, creed or whatever it is, as also a human being. If you don't recognize people coming from different religions, castes, labour class or billionaires in our country as equals, there is no India that would be left.

Yes, the Ganga, you clean, but you also clean Godavari on which I was born and brought up, and also the Cauvery and the Periyar. Please clean all of them. But the Ganga cleaning is a part of the President's speech.

For the last two decades, you had A BJP MP from

Varanasi, including a former President of the BJP. The Mayor of the city is from the BJP. But only now, you suddenly think that cleaning is possible. Anyway, even now, if you are going to do it, it is very good.

Finally, I come to three D's. The last paragraph talks about it. The three D's are "Democracy, Demography and Demand on our side." First, I talk about democracy. You must think seriously about the election reforms. You know and I know, the sort of money spent in these elections. We have seen what these elections have been reduced to. I mean, for parties like ours, it is impossible to participate in such elections because you don't allow us to do wall writing; you don't allow us to put up posters. But then there is no restriction on going to electronic media; there is no restriction on spending thousands of crores of rupees on hiring aeroplanes and then criss-crossing across the country. Then, there is a lacuna in the law that political parties expenditures are not under any ceiling. Candidates are restricted, but not political parties. What is this discrepancy? It is a very incongruous situation. Unless you correct these things, it is just money power that will distort your democracy. We have been talking about electoral reforms all these years. The President should be reminded when we send back the Motion of Thanks expressing our gratefulness that you bring in electoral reforms and bring in proportional representation. Thirty per cent of the vote, you get the majority. Four or five per cent of the vote, but you get no seat. This is absolutely incongruous. Are we a democracy? Not once did we have a Central Government that had more than 50 per cent of the people who voted. Forget 50 per cent of Indians. Fifty per cent of the

people who voted have not voted for any Government in India since Independence. There are more people who voted against the Government than for the Government. Is that democracy? If you want demography on our side, empower our youth, as I said earlier. Give them health, education and employment. Yes, if you want the demand, increase the purchasing power in the hands of people. That you can do only if you take care of your working class, your agricultural labour and the working people. When the Government invests in infrastructure, it creates job, and gives people money through that job creation. So, Sir, unless these are done, these final three D's cannot serve the country. Therefore, I do hope that this august House, while sending back the Motion of Thanks to the President, will very humbly remind him of these issues so that his Government may be urged in the coming days to address these issues. I hope, we will do that.