

Transcript of speech by President Pranab Mukherjee at the inauguration of The Hindu Centre for Politics and Public Policy, Rashtrapathi Bhavan, New Delhi, January 31, 2013.

Good morning. Dr. Malini Parthasarathy, Director, The Hindu Centre, Shri N. Ravi, Director, Kasturi & Sons, Shri N.Ram, Director, Kasturi & Sons, Shri Sunil Khilnani, Member, Board of Advisers, The Hindu Centre, Shri Deve Gowda former Prime Minister, Srimati Sonia Gandhi, Dr. Farooq Abdullah, G K Vasan, L K Advani, Dr. Karan Singh, senior political leaders, ministers, excellencies, ladies and gentlemen: It is indeed a privilege for me to be present on the occasion of the formal inauguration of The Hindu Centre for Politics and Public Policy. We require some centres where there would be dialogue, there will be discussions, and where we can address, in an objective manner, from different perspectives, the ills and problems with which we are confronted.

As, when introducing the subject, Mr. Khilnani has correctly pointed out that the frustration which we see today is not only confined to only one territorial entity, it spreads all over the world. In our younger days when India also started its tryst with democratic destiny, constitutions were framed, we were taught that the essence of democracy is three Ds: debate & discussion, dissent and, finally, decision.

As a Member of Parliament ô I entered Parliament in the late 60s and I had the privilege of serving this great institution. I am sorry to share my personal perceptions, but at the same time I think perhaps I can share it with you, with this distinguished gathering, with the objective that I would like to have a very serious discussion and perhaps the Centre which is just now being inaugurated can be the most appropriate forum to do that.

We were told by our teacher of political science that three Ds are essentials for democracy, that is, debate & discussion, dissension, and finally decision. And when I retired from parliament, on the day of my election as President, to this office, I found that another D which has injected in between, that is, disruption. And disruption of proceedings of the House. On the other hand, simply we cannot brush aside that it is irrelevant, that it is not necessary, because persons who are doing it, they are equally

Members of the Parliament, they are equally responsible political personalities. Therefore, is it not time for us to find out how we can address the issue in its proper perspectives? Sometimes it may happen to compel the recalcitrant administration or government of the day to agree to some discussions or debate through a particular rule and it leads ultimately to disruption. But the end result of the disruption is, to my mind -- and as I said I spent some time in Parliament; when I entered in the late 60's and when I retired, incidentally it happened in the month of July; July '69 to July 2012, when my membership of Lok Sabha came to an end on the date of my election to President. The present disruption puts serious pressure on the government, or it simply denies the right of individual members to express his views at the highest national decision making body. Whether sometimes it provides advantage to the government? because questions hour is the first victim, and questions hour is being used by the Members of Parliament, particularly the private members more than often to put searching questions to the Ministers, not only to get information, but also to sometimes find out contradictions in the policies of the government. Similarly, we talk of electoral reforms; we talk of how the institution should be strengthened. After all any democratic system survives, becomes effective, on the strength of its institutions. If we make a comparative study where the parliamentary form of democracy has become successful, in neo-liberated developing countries which got political emancipation after the Second World War, and where it has failed, perhaps one of the reason, the countries where it failed to establish the relevant institutions to support the democratic structure. Institutions like independent judiciary, free press, legislature and executive -- though in parliamentary form they are one dependent on the other, but essentially, the legislature having total control over the executive in respect of money, finance taxation -- and how these institutions could be made more effective.

Again I am drawing one example from my own experiences. When I entered into Parliament in the late '60s and early '70s, we used to find very illuminative, exhaustive discussions on budget, on finance bills. Financial transactions in those days were not of high order. If I remember correctly the first budget of independent India, total budgetary transactions, receipts and expenditure was Rs 197crore ô 171 crore is the receipt, 197 was the expenditure, divided between not so complicated plan, revenue, capital, non plan expenditure, very simple military expenditure, civil

expenditure. 96 cr was military expenditure and 101 cr was civil expenditure. Taxations were also very simple: income tax and customs. And for that, Parliament devoted good deal of time.

Size of the First Plan was just Rs. 2,000 crores, it was introduced in 1951 and if anybody goes through the proceedings of the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, they will find almost four days they debated on the approach paper of the plan, then when the plan was finally adopted and in between, when the mid-term appraisal of the plan was placed before the Parliament.

Today our budgetary transaction is more than Rs. 12 lakh crores. The Eleventh Plan, which we have completed, and on the end of the 12th plan, total Plan outlay was more than Rs. 37 lakh Cr and it is for us to search ourselves, how much justice we are doing to these huge budgetary transactions, financial transactions over which nobody else, except the elected members of the Parliament and Legislative Assembly have exclusive control as per our Constitution. No money can be spent from the Consolidated Fund of India except by the authority of the law passed by Parliament, no tax can be levied except by the authority of the law passed by Parliament and no borrowing can be made. Of course, there is no limit today, but Constitution has also provided that there should be a law to bring a ceiling on the borrowing. Through FRBM Acts we are trying to bring some discipline. But the short point which I am trying to drive at, that if we want to strengthen our Parliamentary form of democratic system, and now if I understand correctly, many eminent lawyers are also present here, that as per Supreme Court's ruling, Parliamentary system of our Constitution is the basic structure of the Constitution which cannot be amended, which cannot be altered. Therefore, how to make it strong, how to make it more effective. The third problem is the huge electorate. When the first election took place, and when the 14th Lok Sabha election took place. You compare what was the size of the electorate. And it is going to be more. You cannot go on increasing the size of the deliberative body infinitely. Therefore, how to establish contact between the elector and the elected. What is the role of the third tier in the government, whether the real authority of power and authority can be transferred in the true sense of the term so that the pressure on legislative assembly and finally on Parliament are limited to few subjects and few ideas.

I have no ready answers to all of these questions. But these questions are staring at our face, apart from what Mr. Ram, Shri. Khilnani and Dr Malini have pointed out that corruption, some sort of cynicism which is entering into our country, How to address it? And I deeply appreciate the objective which they have stated in the booklet they have given to us. They say we shall function as a public policy resource outlet and not a journalistic resource. This should be. Three basic issues which you are going to take as your primary objective - undertaking research on current topics, promoting dialogue and debate, and holding Track II type Round Tables on [internal] conflicts.

This is very important in this sense. World has really emerged as a global village. And how ever we may wish, even if we desire so, we have no such intention, but even if we wish that we will remain in isolation, we cannot remain because what happens in one part of the world must have its impact on us therefore it is best how to address it. And if there is informed, structured debates, discussions and finally some view comes, it will be beneficial to all of us. And it will be beneficial to the system.

I sincerely thank *The Hindu*, who has - particularly Kasturi & Sons - for 134 years they have served this great nation. And our history of journalism goes side by side with the history of freedom struggle. The journalists, the newspapers, particularly those like *The Hindu* and many others have contributed immensely to furthering our national cause which ultimately brought independence, constitution, democracy and republic, and it is our duty to preserve those.

In conclusion I just like to quote one small observation of Benjamin Franklin. He was asked by a woman - he was the draftsman of the US Constitution, -Well Doctor. We women deliver a child within 10 months. What have you delivered, Doctor for almost two and a half years?" Dr. Benjamin Franklin's response was, -A republic, provided you can keep it.-

Therefore, our forefathers have provided us with a republic, with constitution, with democracy and it is our responsibility to preserve that.

Thank you ladies and gentlemen, for the patience.