

CPP General Body Meeting

Wednesday, 21st December – CH/PH [0930 hrs]

Prime Minister
Pranabji
Dr. Karan Singhji
Fellow MPs

I am meeting you collectively after quite some time, although I know Pranabji recently briefed you on some of the issues that are presently before Parliament. Much time has been lost in this short winter session. The Opposition has not just persisted with but also intensified its obstructionist tactics. We have never refused a debate on any of the issues the Opposition demanded. I wonder if the sole objective of the BJP-led NDA is to derail our legislative agenda. However, we will not be deterred. Our commitment is to the people of India. We will persevere in moving ahead on our governance and legislative programmes.

The Food Security Bill is being introduced in this session. I would like to thank the Prime Minister, the Finance Minister and our colleagues in government for helping fulfill a key commitment we made in our 2009 manifesto. I know that there are still some concerns but this is truly a landmark decision. We must make it work because it will protect a huge number of our people from hunger and malnutrition. The Bill is very much part of our far-reaching rights-based approach to development. You will recall that we had the Right to Information Act and the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act passed in 2005 and the Right to Education Act in 2008. The Food Security Bill also proposes fundamental reforms of the public distribution system. It is important for all of us to understand it in its details. We must take it to the people and make it a central part of our political campaigns.

We are being criticized and attacked for not tackling the scourge of corruption. This is deliberate and malicious misinformation. A year ago at the Burari Session of the AICC, I had spoken extensively on this and identified specific actions that need to be taken. Let me now spell out some of what is being done. Three Bills with major implications are to be passed soon- -those relating to the protection of whistleblowers, enhancing judicial accountability, strengthening anti-money laundering operations, and controlling bribery of Indian public officials by foreign companies. In addition, amendments are being introduced to further strengthen laws relating to the prevention of money laundering. The Citizens Right to Grievance Redressal Bill was introduced yesterday. This incorporates a Citizens Charter which will ensure time-bound delivery of public services. It will deal with public grievances and corruption down to the block level. And just yesterday, the government approved the Lok Pal Bill which is also to be introduced and passed.

All of you must have been present in the House when the debate on the black money issue took place. The Finance Minister forcefully articulated the government's positions and actions. He thoroughly exposed the hollowness and duplicity of the charges of the Opposition, including the conspicuous lack of action all the years the NDA was in power.

There seems to be some relief on the price front. The latest figures, as Pranabji has stated in Parliament, reveal a decline in the rate of food inflation which is of paramount importance. This relief has not come easily. It is the result of consistent and focused government action over the last many months. We recognize that nothing hurts the *aam admi* more than rising food prices. Controlling inflation will remain our overriding priority. Many countries across the world are in financial and economic distress and this is beginning to have an impact on our growth performance as well. However, we have a large domestic market which should enable us to face and withstand external uncertain ties.

We are all aware of the many challenges our government confronts. Every now and then, our political opponents have been trying to create an impression that there are differences between the Congress Party and the government. Let me once and for all nail this. There may well be differing points of view. But whatever is eventually done is done together.

Elections will be held in five states in the next few months. We have been preparing for them well in advance. In both Uttarakhand and Punjab, there is a definite sentiment in our favour and if we continue to campaign with a sense of purpose and, above all, unity, I am confident we will return to power. In Uttar Pradesh too where we face considerable odds, there is growing support for us—the challenge is to convert that support into votes on polling day. All of us representing Uttar Pradesh must work hard in our respective constituencies to support the efforts being made by our colleagues there. In Manipur and Goa where we are in government, our achievements these past five years give us the confidence of securing a renewed mandate.

Our government has just crossed its midway mark. This is now the right time to review what we have been able to accomplish so far and identify the priorities for the remainder of our tenure. I was looking at our 2009 manifesto recently and I was struck by how many of the promises we made have already been implemented. Here I would like to highlight just two recent decisions of the government which are of profound significance. The first is to ensure that at least Rs 7000 crore of government procurement annually will be from businesses owned by dalit and adivasi entrepreneurs. This will be a huge boost to our affirmative action programmes. The second is the two packages of close to Rs 6000 crore for the welfare of lakhs of handloom weavers in different states.

Friends, I cannot see any reason for us to be defeatist. On the contrary, we have every reason to be satisfied with what we have achieved. What seems to be lacking is a more effective effort by both the party and the government in communicating and propagating our accomplishments. Our policies and programmes have unquestionably given our people the ability to improve their lives. The Opposition may be loud but it is opportunistic. Logic and merit are lost in their obstructionist tactics. Our programmes are productive, our policies correct. In a democracy, there is always room for some give and take. But our direction is clear and we must move forward. Let us fight the forces out to destabilize us, forces who never accepted the verdict of 2004, and never reconciled themselves to the renewed mandate we got 2009. Let us rededicate ourselves to the service of the people.

Let me end by wishing you the very best for the festive season and the New Year.