

Congress Working Committee

13th January, 2015: 24 Akbar Road

Opening Remarks by the Congress President

Dr. Manmohan Singh ji,
Rahul ji,
Senior Colleagues,
Friends,

We are convening for the first time this year therefore let me take this opportunity to wish each and every one of you a very Happy New Year. Given that the previous year was a challenging one, I am hopeful that the New Year will herald a new beginning for the Party. 2015 is also a very memorable year for us, as it marks 130 years of unbroken service to the nation. And it is also an occasion to prepare the party for many more years of service to the country.

A key instrument to achieving this goal will be the expansion of our party worker base. Our organizational structure must be such to allow for our membership drive to become a force to galvanize our workers. We will use our ongoing membership enrollment program to launch a mass contact mission, which has to be unprecedented in scale and scope.

As we are embarking on registering new members, we have to ensure that our internal processes and systems are sufficiently robust to recognize, reward and nurture talent.

You are aware that the Vice President has held extensive deliberations with colleagues and leaders from all the States. On the basis of the views that transpired in those interactions about the Party organization, the Central Election Authority has prepared a note on the membership drive and proposed amendments to the party constitution. This note is with you. We now need to apply our collective wisdom to discuss these reforms and its proposed implementations. While doing so we need to ensure that any change strengthens our commitment to organizational transparency and accountability.

While it is important that we reflect on the short comings that caused our defeat, both in the Lok Sabha and recent assembly elections and the need to reenergize our party, we need to be extra vigilant about what is happening around us. While we debate on how to strengthen internal democracy institutions within the Party, the country's democratic institutions are being undermined. The BJP government has already promulgate 10 ordinances in its seven month tenure. Which roughly translates to one ordinance every 28 days!

It is not just the frequency of ordinances that we should take cognizance of, but also the context, nature and timing.

The UPA government was guided by the Constitutional opinion that an ordinance is a provision of last resort, an executive discretion that needs to be used judiciously. On the contrary, today's Government is operating through a perilous notion that ordinances constitute "good governance".

We have to communicate effectively that the Modi government is not serving national interest by bypassing parliamentary scrutiny and debate. We need to question the extraordinary urgency to introduce some of these ordinances. "Is there any ulterior motive behind this hurry?"

The Land Acquisition Act came into effect after wide ranging talks and consultations. This government has effectively destroyed this landmark legislation and brought back the law passed by the British in 1894 through the backdoor.

The ordinance on coal mines has surreptitiously undone the spirit of nationalization of coal mines that had crucial safeguards.

It is not just the dictatorial tendencies of the government which are of concern for us all, but also its anti-farmer and anti-poor policies. While the Prime Minister makes much of lowering inflation, he doesn't mention how he has lowered the income of farmers. His government has increased the MSP to select crops only by 3%. The MSP of certain crops such as cotton has now gone below cultivation price causing several farmers to commit

suicide. A range of other crops grown by over a crore farmers such as maize, groundnut, millet has not been given any increase in MSP. Rural wage growth is seeing a sharp fall. His government's policies have sown the seeds of acute agrarian distress.

The government is also diluting welfare policies such as NREGA, Food Security Act, Forest Rights Act and Self Help Groups institutions.

What is equally if not more alarming is that in the last few weeks, the true colours and intentions of the Prime Minister and the BJP have become abundantly clear. Influential members of the government and the party have been making provocative statements and speeches. This is, in many ways, a continuation of the strategy of polarization adopted by them in last year's Lok Sabha elections as well as in recent assembly polls. The Prime Minister has chosen to ignore these disturbing statements and speeches raising questions on his real agenda, an agenda that causes sharp division, mistrust and hatred among communities, and agenda that can only cause grievous harm to our nation's pluralistic and secular ethos.

Friends, all of us have to contribute to reviving our party's electoral fortunes. Both structural changes and changes in leadership styles are required. We cannot be found wanting at such a crucial juncture of our country's political history. In its long history the Congress has faced adversity and adversaries, and we have collectively found our way forward. We shall go forward, again. The way forward should be that we go back to the people. All of us from AICC down to the block level, need to renew ties and connections with the people everywhere; listen to their grievances and aspirations –and, then, find a way to articulate their hopes and desires. A mass political party has to reach out to all sections of society. The Congress has a historical obligation to renew, reinvigorate, revive itself. This is as much true of the organization as much of individuals as well.

I therefore urge all of you to apply your mind and propose ways and means to reach out to the masses and make this government answerable and accountable.