

Economic growth and poverty alleviation are not mutually exclusive, as critics of Budget would have you believe

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Congress has come out with another surprise. It is now propounding that economic growth and poverty alleviation are mutually exclusive and it would be unwise to aim at both concurrently. What an audacity to say so after claiming credit for redeeming the fortunes of the country through reforms post 1991. This surprising theory was propounded in their criticism of the 2017-18 Budget, that it lacked an overarching goal. The grand old party asked worriedly, was the Budget growth oriented or aimed at poverty alleviation or fiscal and monetary stability?

I am convinced that rapid economic growth is the most effective tool to dent poverty, through increased opportunities for the needy sections. Economic development has to be inclusive. Congress seems to be having a contrary opinion on this.

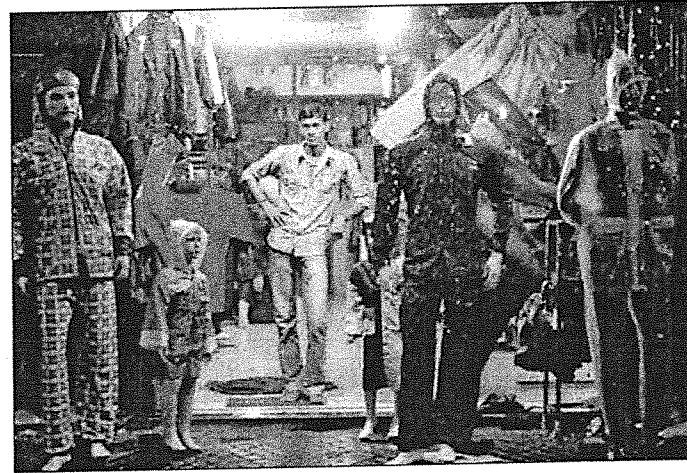
The Budget has been widely welcomed for doing the best that could be done in the context of emerging global economic challenges and domestic imperatives and for not rocking the boat. The government does not believe in scripting the country's annual financial statements for news-

rooms and economists and commentators who are not connected with the people. Union Budget 2017-18 did what was feasible and required for the economy and the people that it should serve. Its objective was an integrated approach for inclusive economic development, connected to both the people and the economy.

The Budget sought to place more money in the hands of large sections of the people and help crores of small and medium

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scale enterprises who generate the most jobs, besides giving a fillip to farming, rural development and infrastructure. All this was while keeping an eye on sound financial management. Private consumption, enhanced infrastructure, reviving the farm sector and rural areas do go a long way in spurring economic growth. I am surprised that former finance minister P Chidambaram who presented



some headline hunting budgets in the past thinks otherwise. But even he has grudgingly acknowledged that the Budget "did not do great damage to the economy". I take it as a restrained compliment.

Yes, the Budget was presented about three months after the withdrawal of high value currency notes was announced on November 8 last year. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the government were pretty aware of the short term difficulties that it would result in but were confident that people would support it. And that is what the common man of this country did. He rose to the occasion as he had the ability to understand the long term gains

of demonetisation. For anyone to theorise that people put up with demonetisation as they had no choice was just insulting the wisdom of the people of this country. They accepted demonetisation because it has the potential to address their frustration over rising corruption.

Fighting corruption was one of the principal promises of BJP during the election campaign in 2014. People responded hugely, giving us the first ever clear majority in the Lok Sabha in 30 years. Note withdrawal is a part of the overarching anti-corruption architecture being put in place by the Modi government. We know that this is hurting some very badly and hence their song and drama

against demonetisation and the prime minister.

In his reply to the discussion on Motion of Thanks to the President's Address in Lok Sabha, the prime minister dwelt at length on corruption. After referring to various scams during the previous UPA regime, he said then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh could get away with all those unscathed. Further elaborating on this he referred to wearing a raincoat while taking a bath. It was only meant to bring out that one could remain dry while taking a bath if only one wore a raincoat. It certainly did not mean any disrespect to the former prime minister.

Modi was called all kinds of names including 'maut ka saudagar' by none other than the Congress president. Taking a cue from this, other Congress leaders went vitriolic calling him khoon ka dalal, Hitler, Mussolini, etc. Leader of the Congress party in Lok Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge recently said on the floor of the House that not even a dog from BJP died for the country's Independence. Is this all decent language against the prime minister? Slipping political fortunes are no reason for political abuse. There is a need for a new normal in parliamentary debates and political discourse.

The writer is Union Minister of Urban Development