

THE SPECIAL SESSION OF M.P. LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

• **By Dr. M.N. Buch**

The basic difference between a democracy and an authoritarian State is that in a democracy it is the people's representatives "in Parliament gathered" who lay down the basic framework of laws and policies which determine how government will function. The legislators, through the budget, decide how much money government can spend and on what and it is through the budget that the legislators permit government to raise resources, including through taxes. It is a well-known axiom of democracy that no taxation without representation. Under authoritarian rule government is by decree in which it is the ruler who decides how the country will be administered.

The people's representatives are Members of the Legislature. Ideally the House should be in permanent session, but because Members of the Legislature need time to spend with their constituents and because the business of the House is not concerned with the minutiae of administration, perhaps it cannot be kept engaged for all 365 days of the year. That is why meetings of the Legislature are divided into sessions and under Article 174 of the Constitution it is the Governor who summons the Legislature to meet and he has the power to prorogue the House or dissolve the Assembly and order fresh elections. The Governor exercises this power on the advice of the Council of Ministers under Article 163. It is the prerogative of the Chief Minister to advise the Governor to summon a session of the House and this cannot be called into question by the Opposition.

The Governor of Madhya Pradesh has summoned the Legislature to meet for a session from 11th to 14th May, 2010. Whereas there is no specific legislative or other official business to be transacted, the session has been convened in order to highlight the achievements of government and to present before the people a blueprint of 'Swarnim' or golden, Madhya Pradesh. The Opposition, in particular the Congress, has opposed the session stating that it is only a vehicle for propaganda and has no real business to transact. The Congress, therefore, has decided to boycott the session.

The Constitution in Article 174 states that the intervening period between sessions of the House shall not exceed six months. It should be the desire of Members of the House to have as many and as prolonged sessions as possible so that they can place the problems of the people before the Legislature and the government. Here we have the strange case of the Opposition boycotting a special session because it feels that this will promote the interests of the ruling party. There is a Business Advisory Committee of the Legislature which can advise the Speaker on items of business, the procedure of business and to ensure that government does not monopolise the discussions. During the session the opposition can refute the claims of success made by the ruling party and can also force government to transact normal business. Boycotting the session means that the ruling party has a clear run. The boycott of the session is a clever gimmick, but not a wise move. In fact the Congress is missing the opportunity to debunk the claims of government and place the real picture of Madhya Pradesh before the people. For reasons best known to itself the Congress has let the opportunity slip and by boycotting the session it has handed over the game, set and match to the ruling party through a walkover. We the people demand that the Congress must act as a responsible opposition, attend the session and call the government to account.
