

**WELCOME ADDRESS BY THE HON'BLE SPEAKER, LOK SABHA,
SHRI SOMNATH CHATTERJEE**

MR. SPEAKER : Respected Upa-Rashtrapatiji; Respected Pradhan Mantriji; Hon. Governors; Hon. Chief Ministers; Hon. Presiding Officers; Hon. Leaders of Opposition; Hon. Members of Parliament; Our Most Distinguished Guest, Prof. Amartya Sen; Secretaries-General of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha; Ladies and Gentlemen:

I believe that all of you will agree with me that it is a very happy day when we have won a Gold Medal in the Olympics. Let us all congratulate the young Shri Abhinav Bindra, as he has won a Gold Medal for India and has made us proud. We extend our heartiest congratulations to him.

Friends, today is also the Centenary of Shahid Khudiram Bose's martyrdom. We have won our Freedom because of the supreme sacrifices made by many of our martyrs and freedom fighters. Today, the Parliament of India pays its solemn homage to the memories of our great freedom fighters and martyrs.

I consider it a great privilege and an honour to welcome the distinguished gathering to this august Hall of the Indian Parliament, which has been witness to many historic events. May I take this opportunity to express our profound gratitude to Respected Upa-Rashtrapatiji; Respected Pradhan Mantriji; and other distinguished guests for being with us on the occasion of the Inaugural 'Prof. Hiren Mukerjee Memorial Annual Parliamentary Lecture', organized by the Parliament of India, in the memory and in honour of the legendary Parliamentarian; outstanding scholar; and veteran Communist leader, Prof. Hiren Mukerjee. I would like to, particularly, thank Bharat Ratna and Nobel Laureate, Prof. Amartya Sen, for graciously acceding to our request to deliver the Lecture on a theme dear to both him and Prof. Hiren Mukerjee.

On this occasion, we are happy to be able to unveil the portrait of Prof. Hiren Mukherjee. We are grateful to the Government of West Bengal for donating the portrait, and to hon. Upa-Rashtrapatiji for kindly agreeing to unveil it before this distinguished gathering.

Prof. Hirendra Nath Mukerjee was a brilliant Parliamentarian who had the distinction of being a Member of Parliament for five consecutive terms from the early years of the Republic till 1977. An eminent historian, a prolific writer, an exceptional Parliamentarian and a spell-binding orator, Prof. Hiren Mukerjee left an indelible imprint of his multi-faceted personality on our country's Parliamentary and political life by his erudition, his articulation and his remarkable contributions in enriching our Parliamentary institutions. It is to place on record our profound appreciation and gratitude to this distinguished Parliamentarian that the Parliament of India has instituted this Annual Lecture Series.

Today, we have in our midst one of the most distinguished economists and acknowledged intellectuals in the world, Prof. Amartya Sen, to deliver the First Lecture, on the theme, "Demands of Social Justice". Prof. Sen has always been deeply committed to human dignity and equality and to the welfare of the poor and the deprived.

Social Justice is a theme, which was dealt with extensively by Prof. Hiren Mukerjee during his lifetime. The running theme of Prof. Hiren Mukerjee's conviction was the concern for the poor and the downtrodden, and until the last, he believed in the need to change society for the all-round development of the country and the citizens. Prof. Amartya Sen too is an ardent and articulate advocate of a just and inclusive society, in which no section of the people, particularly the poor, will be denied social and economic opportunities and the fruits of progress and prosperity, will be enjoyed by all. Given Prof. Hiren Mukerjee's and Prof. Amartya Sen's social and intellectual sensitivity and deep humanism, it is only appropriate that the theme of today's Lecture is "Demands of Social Justice".

We have introduced this Lecture Series with a view to help bring in some of the issues of great concern to the common people of our country and of contemporary relevance to the center-stage of our socio-political discourse. It is only appropriate that the Parliament, being the highest representative body of the

people, should initiate that process. We have to go a long way in building a progressive and prosperous India that our Founding Fathers had visualized for the country at the dawn of Independence. Providing social and economic justice to the vast segments of the masses who have been kept out of the mainstream of our socio-political life should be among the core concerns of our country today, and it is a great challenge before our National Leadership to look beyond partisan and confrontational politics and to work unitedly to realize this unfulfilled promise of our Freedom within the framework of a healthy democratic society.

I am sure that Prof. Sen's Lecture this evening, will stimulate a National debate on the need to create conditions for all our citizens, regardless of their caste and creed; to enjoy justice and equality; and other democratic rights for a dignified existence.

The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, in its Nobel Citation to Prof. Amartya Sen had said, and I quote: "By combining tools from economics and philosophy, he has restored an ethical dimension to the discussion of vital economic problems". It is indeed a matter of honour for us that Prof. Amartya Sen has very kindly accepted our invitation to deliver the First Prof. Hiren Mukerjee Memorial Annual Parliamentary Lecture for which we are truly to him. I am sure that this august assembly will greatly benefit from Prof. Amartya Sen's profound scholarship and his perceptive understanding of the "Demands of Social Justice".

With these words, I now once again heartily welcome this distinguished gathering to this Lecture. Thank you very much.

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