

Frequent polls a burden: President

In his hour-long, maiden address to the joint sitting of Parliament on Monday, President Ram Nath Kovind covered an entire range of issues concerning governance, including pitching for simultaneous Lok Sabha and Assembly elections.

“Frequent elections not only impose a huge burden on human resources but also impede the development process due to the promulgation of the model code of conduct,” President Kovind said.

He said “a sustained debate is required on the subject of simultaneous elections and all political parties need to arrive at a consensus on this issue.”

Apart from Vice-President M. Venkaiah Naidu, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Lok Sabha Speaker Sumitra Mahajan, those who were seated in the front row to listen to Mr. Kovind’s first speech in Parliament’s Central Hall included BJP chief Amit Shah, Congress president Rahul Gandhi, Sonia Gandhi and BJP patriarch L.K. Advani.

President Kovind said the government’s diplomatic efforts had ensured a “new-found respect for India” and increasing role in global affairs.

Without naming Pakistan, the President said terrorist attacks in some parts of Jammu and Kashmir were “directly related to cross-border infiltration”.

Anti-terror operations

“With better coordination, our Army, paramilitary forces and Jammu Kashmir Police are giving a befitting response to the perpetrators,” he said. He asserted that in the northeast and Maoist violence-hit areas, there had been a reduction in violence and the situation had improved.

“My government has kept open the path of dialogue with those who wish to shun violence and join the mainstream, while reposing faith in the Constitution,” he said.

Strongly pitching the government as pro-poor, President Kovind mentioned several initiatives like housing for all by 2022, connecting all villages with roads, uninterrupted power supply and LPG connections to the poor.

Tax reform

Calling the Goods and Services Tax the biggest tax reform since Independence, he said the government was seeking to achieve the economic integration of the country.

He even addressed the issue of the health of the public sector banks, many of which are saddled with non-performing assets, and said that the government would “recapitalise the public sector banks by infusing more than Rs. 2 lakh crore of capital into them”.

“Our fight against corruption continues. Towards this end, registration of about 3.5 lakh dubious companies has been cancelled in the past one year,” he said.

He said the government believed in “empowerment and not appeasement” of the minorities by making intensive efforts for their economic, social and educational empowerment.

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