

Press statement issued by Shri L.K. Advaniji, Leader of the Opposition (Lok Sabha) at a press conference in Aurangabad (Maharashtra)

Why was the PM weak in presenting India's concerns at G-20 Summit over our national wealth stashed away in Swiss banks and other tax havens?

Exactly a week ago, on 29th March, I had addressed a press conference in New Delhi on the issue of “the UPA Government’s deafening silence about Indian wealth, estimated at between Rs. 25 lakh and Rs 70 lakh crore, hoarded in secret Swiss bank accounts and other tax havens around the world.”

The press conference was held in the backdrop of Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh’s visit to London on April 2 to attend the G-20 summit, where, I had stated, the issue was likely to be discussed.



The issue was indeed discussed and the final statement of the Summit Leaders affirmed that they would “take action against non-cooperative jurisdictions, including tax havens. We stand ready to deploy sanctions to protect our public finances and financial systems. The era of banking secrecy is over. We note that the OECD has today published a list of countries assessed by the Global Forum against the international standard for exchange of tax information.”

What is surprising is that the Prime Minister did not mention this point in his opening written statement to the press on the conclusion of the G-20 summit. In his lengthy remarks at the official dinner hosted by Britain’s Prime Minister Gordon Brown on April 1 on the occasion of the G-20 meeting, Dr. Singh alluded to this matter in a casual one-sentence reference that said: “We should also endorse sharing information and bringing tax havens and non-cooperating jurisdictions under closer scrutiny.”

The PM failed to raise India’s concerns over the huge quantity of its sovereign wealth deposited in secret bank accounts abroad. He also chose not to express the Indian government’s resolve to bring the monies back through international cooperation. Earlier, at the preparatory meet at Berlin for the G-20 Summit, the Indian delegation did not even talk about tax havens, knowing fully well that it is a major item for the OECD countries.

It is obvious from the final communiqué of the Summit Leaders that other members of G-20 were far more vociferous than India in stating the “era of banking secrecy is over”. They went to the extent of demanding “sanctions” against tax havens. Indeed, on the occasion of the G-20 Summit, OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development), a grouping of developed countries, officially released a statement estimating that about \$11 trillion (Rs. 550 lakh crore) was parked in tax

havens. It also released the blacklist of non-cooperative nations, and specifically mentioned Switzerland among them.

If developed countries in OECD have taken the issue of Swiss bank accounts so seriously, why did the government of a developing country like India not show similar seriousness? Who is in greater need of this stolen wealth – India or OECD countries? Is it the claim of the UPA Government that no corruption and crime money from India is deposited in Swiss banks and other tax havens? Or is it finding it uncomfortable to prise open the veil of secrecy of these tax havens?

In this context, I would like the Prime Minister to release the list of travel destinations of his Cabinet Ministers in the last five years – particularly Switzerland and other tax havens when they were not part of their official tour agenda.

The G-20 statement has vindicated my affirmation in my last week's press conference that the western nations want strict action against banking secrecy and tax havens. It is sad to see that the Government of India is not enthusiastic.

I only wish to reiterate today that the NDA, if voted to form the next government, will spare no effort to bring Indian wealth back from its secret abodes abroad. For this money belongs to the people of India – the farmers, the landless and the workers, who are in great economic stress today. It can, and will, be deployed for implementing many ambitious anti-poverty schemes and programmes.

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**UPA has disintegrated; Third Front is an illusion;
NDA alone can provide a stable government committed to Good Governance,
Development & Security.**

The Election Commission announced the schedule for the elections to the 15th Lok Sabha on March 2. The biggest political development between March 2 and April 5 is the disintegration of the UPA. In Maharashtra, the NCP has contributed to the UPA's disarray by disowning the prime ministerial candidate of the Congress and also by fielding candidates against the Congress in Orissa, Gujarat and other states. Shri P.A. Sangma, a senior and respected leader of the NCP, has openly rebelled against the Congress.

I am in Maharashtra, which is today one of the worst governed states in the country. The two partners in the coalition government in Mumbai — Congress and NCP — are also partners in the worst government in New Delhi.

Assembly elections in Maharashtra are not far away. My appeal to the voters in this state is to contribute decisively to ridding India of the misrule of the UPA government at the Centre and, thereafter, get ready to rid Maharashtra of the Congress-NCP misrule.

The so-called Third Front is nothing but an illusion, a loose collection of disparate parties without any glue to hold them together. They have no common agenda and no commonly accepted leader. Their claim that India will have a Third Front government after the Lok Sabha polls is farcical. Indeed, at a

time when India is facing many formidable challenges both at home and in the neighbourhood, the very thought of the repeat of the 1996 misadventure of two unstable Congress-supported United Front governments (neither of which could complete even a year in office) is scary to most Indians.

Hence, it is becoming clearer by the day that the NDA is the only cohesive alliance that can provide a stable government. The BJP's leadership of the NDA will ensure that this government will remain committed to Good Governance, Development and Security. Our commitment to these ideals is fully reflected in the BJP's recently released election manifesto.

As of now, the NDA is far ahead of its rivals. I am not only hopeful but also confident that the people of India will give the NDA a decisive mandate in the coming parliamentary elections.