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CAA fulfils wish of Gandhiji, President tells Parliament

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He lauds both Houses for enacting it

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President Ram Nath Kovind on Friday kick-started the Budget session of Parliament with an address to both Houses. He lauded the enactment of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) that, he said, fulfilled the wish of Mahatma Gandhi who had said that Hindus and Sikhs of Pakistan, who didn't want to stay there, could come to India.

In an hour-long address, he spoke at length on the importance of the Constitution, adding that "in a democracy, nothing is more sacred than the mandate of the people. The people of the country have given this mandate to my government for the making of New India".

He said India had always believed in the principle of equal respect for all faiths, but at the time of Partition in 1947, "this very belief of India and of its people came under the most severe attack".

In the environment prevailing in the aftermath of Partition, Mahatma Gandhi had said, "Hindus and Sikhs of Pakistan, who do not wish to live there, can come



President Ram Nath Kovind addressing a joint session of Parliament on Friday. •PTI

government of India to ensure a normal life for them."

'Procedure unchanged'
"It is our responsibility to honour this wish of the founding fathers of our nation. I am happy that both Houses have fulfilled this wish by enacting the Citizenship (Amendment) Act," Mr. Kovind said.

He clarified that "the procedures which have existed for people from all faiths of the world who believe in India and who wish to obtain Indian citizenship remain unchanged. A person of any faith can follow these processes and become a citizen of India."

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CAA fulfils the wish of Gandhiji, says President

He made a specific mention to the incidents of anti-Sikh violence at Nankana Sahib in Pakistan and said it was the duty of "all of us" to bring such atrocities to the attention of the global community.

He also expressed the view - without a direct reference to the CAA - that mutual discussions and debates strengthened democracy, while asserting that "any kind of violence in the name of protests weakens society and the nation". The President dwelt on the developments in Kashmir following the dilution of Article 370, saying the government had taken Jan Sangh founder and Commerce Minister in the Nehru government Syama Prasad Mukherjee's words to the heart that Jammu and

Kashmir, too, should benefit from India's Constitution and federal structure.

He lauded the government for conducting local body elections and accelerating development there.

Mr. Kovind also highlighted the work done by various Ministries, including those that had enhanced India's ranking on international indices. "On the Tourism Index, India has risen from 52nd to the 34th rank, while on the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business ranking, the country has jumped 79 ranks to stand at the 63rd."

"Eight crore people were given free gas connections, two crore free houses and 38 crore people have been helped with bank accounts," he said.