

RAJYA SABHA

*SYNOPSIS OF DEBATE

(Proceedings other than Questions and Answers)

Tuesday, September 15, 2020 / Bhadra 24, 1942 (Saka)

Reference to the International Day of Democracy

MR. CHAIRMAN: Hon. Members, 15th September, 2020 is being celebrated world-wide as 'International Day of Democracy' for the purpose of promoting and upholding the principles of democracy. Democracy is based on the freely-expressed will of the people to determine their own political, economic, social and cultural systems and their full participation in all aspects of life. India is the largest democracy in the world. Democracy is the thread which holds us together. It is the bedrock of our Unity in Diversity, the binding force which has helped propel our country on the path to progress. Democracy becomes synonymous with our Constitution, which itself is the embodiment of democratic principles. Our Constitution, while providing enough avenues to the citizens for their all round development, also ensures that they are able to contribute meaningfully to the development of this country. This Parliament is the hallmark of democracy and we, as legislators are the flag bearers of democratic principles. Let us resolve on this International Day of Democracy to strive continuously to further enrich the democratic principles as enshrined in our Constitution.

*This Synopsis is not an authoritative record of the proceedings of the Rajya Sabha.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE CHAIR

MR. CHAIRMAN: I have to inform Members that in view of the limited functional time available and the special seating arrangements made for the current Session, I have acceded to the request made by the Minister of Parliamentary Affairs for allowing him to lay all the papers listed under the heading 'Papers to be Laid on the Table' and Statements by Ministers related to Department-related Parliamentary Standing Committees in the List of Business for the day in the name of other Ministers, on their behalf. I have further advised that the Minister of Parliamentary Affairs may make himself available in the Rajya Sabha or ensure the presence of either of the Ministers of State in the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs for laying of papers, if he is pre-occupied otherwise.

MATTERS RAISED WITH THE PERMISSION OF THE CHAIR

1. Reimbursement of Polavaram Dues to Andhra Pradesh

SHRI V. VIJAYASAI REDDY: Polavaram Project is a life-line for Andhra Pradesh State. The Government of Andhra Pradesh has fixed a target of completion by December, 2021. It is a national project and all the funds have to be released by the Central Government. As on date, the outstanding amount to be released to the Government of Andhra Pradesh is Rs.3,805 crore. The Comptroller and Auditor General of India has also audited the figures and has confirmed the amount. The Government of Andhra Pradesh explaining the details of the problems that are being faced by the State has requested the Central Government for immediate release of the funds. It has also given a plan for hassle-free release of funds to avoid the possible delay. It is requested that measures to release the funds for the Polavaram Project be immediately taken so that it could be completed by the target date of December, 2021.

THE MINISTER OF FINANCE AND THE MINISTER OF CORPORATE AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI NIRMALA SITHARAMAN), responding to the matter, said: The hon. Member has raised a very important issue. The discussion with the Finance Minister of Andhra Pradesh has been going on. The Union Minister of Water Resources is also in touch so that this can get cleared at the earliest. This gap occurred due to the CAG certification which was submitted by the State of Andhra Pradesh. We will follow it up.

(Shri Jairam Ramesh and Shri K.C. Ramamurthy associated.)

2. Restriction on the Content of Web Series/TV Serials

DR. VIKAS MAHATME: Recently a web series namely Virgin Bhaskar was released which had depiction of abusive visual and voice of Ahilyabai Holkar ji, which caused anger amongst all shepherd community etc. This scene was cut from this web series with the help of Hon'ble Minister. If presentation of a play requires clearance of the censor board, why no certification or legal action is taken on web series. The Government is requested to enact a law so that the web series can be banned and Indian culture can be saved.

(Shri K.C. Ramamurthy associated.)

3. Need to enhance 100 Days limit for Work under MNREGA to Tackle Unemployment in Migrant Labour

SHRIMATI CHHAYA VERMA: In the past, the lockdown caused a lot of problems for the workers. Only 10 days work is available under MNREGA work. The Government is requested that 200 days work should be made available under MNREGA in the country and workers get wages on time and this should be a functional plan.

4. Constitution of Krishna Water Disputes Tribunal

SHRI K.R. SURESH REDDY: After formation of separate Telangana and Andhra Pradesh States dispute has arisen between them over sharing of Krishna River waters. To resolve the matter there

is the Inter-State River Water Disputes Act. The Government of Telangana has requested the Central Government to refer the dispute for constitution of a Tribunal under Section 5(1) of the said Act. The Central Government instead extended the term of Brijesh Kumar Tribunal and referred the matter under Section 89 of the Andhra Pradesh Re-organisation Act, which has a very limited scope and will not be able to do justice to the people of Telangana. The Central Government is urged to refer the sharing of water dispute immediately to a Tribunal under Sections 3 and 5 of the Inter-State River Water Disputes Act and resolve the matter.

5. Need for Inclusion of Tenancy and Leaseholder Farmers within Ambit of PM-Kisan Yojana

SHRI M. SHANMUGAM: Under the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi farmers are paid a grant of Rs.6,000 every year in three equal instalments. These grants are provided to the farmers who own less than five acres of land. But the tenant farmers, the leaseholder farmers, who own less than five acres of land and who are languishing under abject poverty, are excluded from this scheme. In Tamil Nadu, most of the tenant farmers are growing paddy which is very risky cultivation. As a social security measure, the benefit of P.M. Kisan Yojana should be extended to all the farmers. The Central Government is urged to include the tenancy farmers and leaseholder farmers in the P.M. Kisan Scheme.

(Shri P. Wilson associated.)

6. Alleged Conspiracy to Defame the Film Industry

SHRIMATI JAYA BACHCHAN: The entertainment industry in our country provides direct and indirect employment to lakhs of people everyday. But, there are people in this industry who have name and fame through this and now are trying to defame it. On the other hand, there are people who are some of the highest taxpayers and they are still being harassed. All kinds of promises are being made to entertainment industry but are never kept. The Government must stand by the entertainment industry because the entertainment industry always comes forward to help the Government

in whatever good work that the Government takes up. Just because of few people, the image of the entire industry can't be tarnished. This industry brings international name and fame also. But now, the industry needs protection and support of the Government.

(Several hon'ble Members associated.)

7. Provision for Reservation to Marathas in Jobs and Admission in Educational Institutions

***SHRI SAMBHAJI CHHATRAPATI:** The Supreme Court Bench's decision to put on hold the Maratha reservation and referring the matter to a larger bench has caused a lot of damage to the Maratha society. The Government is requested to make a law for reservation in Maharashtra as available in Tamil Nadu so that Maratha society may get justice.

SHRI RAJEEV SATAV: Maratha society got reservation after a extensive struggle. According to the recent judgement of the Court, this reservation has come under threat. The matter is before the Supreme Court for hearing. The Central Government is requested to place its stand with the State Government in favour of Maratha reservation during the hearing so that Maratha reservation may continue.

(Shri Sharad Pawar and Dr. Vikas Mahatme associated)

8. Revival of National Paper Industries in Assam and Release of Pending Salaries/Statutory Dues to Workers/Employees

SHRI RIPUN BORA: There are two paper mills earning profit in Assam. But, suddenly both these mills have been facing loss since 2014 and ultimately from 2016 onwards are being closed down. From 2016 the State Government as well as the Central Government have been giving assurances to give special package for revival of these two paper mills. But nothing has been done till today. The employees have not been getting salaries for four years. Seventy

* Spoke in Marathi.

workers have died so far for want of salary and medicine and three employees have committed suicide. There are two lakh employees who are directly or indirectly engaged with these paper mills. But now their future is finished. On the other hand, bamboo cultivation have also been finished. My request to the Government is to revive this paper mill immediately so that economy can be restored.

(Shrimati Arpita Ghosh and Shri Elamaram Kareem associated.)

9. Concern over Suicides by Labourers who lost their Jobs during the Lockdown

PROF. RAM GOPAL YADAV: Lakhs of people have become unemployed due to the shutdown of small and big factories and businesses because of lockdown in the country. Educated peoples are being hired on contract basis for five years in the government sector and their working will be reviewed after five years. They are also confused. Depression, despair and mental stress are increasing among people and they are considering to commit suicide. Therefore, I request the Government that those people, who have lost their jobs and wages due to lockdown, should be given at least Rs. 15,000 per month as allowance so that they do not die of hunger at least and they can live. I would like to consider it sympathetically.

(Several hon'ble Members associated.)

10. Concern over Increase in Number of Suicides and Mental Health Cases in the Country

SHRI ANAND SHARMA: I wish to draw the attention of this House and the Government towards the alarming increase in number of suicides and mental health cases in India. India accounts for 15 per cent of the total suicides in the world. During the year 2019, there has been an increase of four per cent in the number of suicides in our country. Reports indicate that one in seven persons in India is suffering from depression. Number of persons affected by the mental health issues has exponentially increased after the Covid crisis and lockdown, especially the students and the children who are

committing suicides across the country. Mental health situation in India demands active policy interventions and resource allocations by the Government. Mental illness must mandatorily be put under the ambit of life insurance. The Central Government in association with State Governments needs to evolve innovative modes to deepen the penetration of services and establish helplines and counselling centres to effectively deal with mental health issues.

(Several hon'ble Members associated.)

SPECIAL MENTIONS

1. Demand to Ban Online Rummy

SHRI K.C. RAMAMURTHY: Rummy is considered to be a game of skill. In reality, it is gambling as it ruins families financially and otherwise. It is unfortunate that many have become addicts. The online Rummy is rapidly spreading its tentacles by luring all sections, particularly youth, with attractive advertisements and promotions assuring lucrative returns which are totally false. This is creating worry among parents about the future of their loved ones. The online real money gaming industry is estimated at Rs.2,200 crores and is growing at 30 per cent annually and would touch Rs.12,000 crores by 2023. I do not see any industry that can grow at this pace in the world. In view of the above, I request the Government to immediately declare online Rummy as illegal and ban the same.

(Shri Vishambhar Prasad Nishad and Dr. Amar Patnaik associated)

2. Demand to Use the term 'Physical Distancing' Instead of 'Social Distancing'

DR. SANTANU SEN: As we know that in order to avoid Corona transmission, the term "Social Distancing" is being regularly used. Actually, it is a "Physical Distance" of 6 feet between two persons which is needed. But on the contrary, use of the term "Social Distance" has indirectly promoted "Social Stigma", which has led to

an attitude of boycotting Covid patient socially and as its consequences, Covid patients and their family members are facing several inhuman situations. So, to stop this social discrimination and social stigma, the term "Social Distancing" should not be utilized any more to fight Covid and instead of that "Physical Distancing" should be used.

(Several hon'ble Members associated.)

3. Need to Address the Inequalities in Access to Education during the Pandemic Owing to the Digital Divide

SHRI TIRUCHI SIVA: With corona cases on the rise, schools remain shut with children now being able to access education solely through digital means. This has resulted in vast disparities in access to education among children. It was promised by the hon. Prime Minister that in a thousand days the digital divide will be bridged. The Centre must immediately take steps partnering with NGO's working in the field of education and technology to introduce schemes to address this digital divide. I urge the Government to take immediate measures as this is the need of the hour.

(Shri Ravi Prakash Verma, Shri K.K. Ragesh, Dr. Amar Patnaik and Shri Jose K. Mani associated.)

4. Demand to Revise MNREGA Norms to Benefit Migrant Workers Affected Due to Lockdown

SHRI P.L. PUNIA: Crores of workers returned to their villages during the lockdown and MNREGA contributed significantly in providing employment to them. In today's situation, the corona is constantly rising. How long this situation will last, no guess can be made so it is necessary that more employment should be arranged through the MNREGA in the villages. In every state, 100 days of work for labourers are almost complete. Now these labourers are not being provided work and they are unemployed again. Therefore, I request that the daily wage should be increased to a minimum of Rs 300, two persons should be provided employment instead of one

person in the family and days of employment should be increased from 100 to 200.

(Shri Vishambhar Prasad Nishad, Shri Rajeev Satav and Dr. Amar Patnaik associated.)

5. Demand to Withdraw the Exorbitant Hike in Price of Platform Tickets

SHRI ANIL DESAI: The Railway Board has increased the fare of platform tickets from Rs. 10/- to Rs. 50/- per person. It is not justified. Entry at the platform should always be need based. If a passenger is old or physically incapable only in that case entry may be permitted for one person to help such rail passenger. Increase in the fare of platform ticket is no solution to control rush on platform. In the name of controlling Corona Virus, the Railways should not hike the fare of the platform tickets. Therefore, I urge upon the government to withdraw the said hike in fares of platform tickets immediately and allow only need based entry for a platform ticket of Rs. 10/- only.

(Shri Sanjay Singh, Shri Vishambhar Prasad Nishad, Shri Rajeev Satav and Dr. Amar Patnaik associated.)

GOVERNMENT BILLS

The Allied and Healthcare Professions Bill, 2018

The Bill was, by leave of the House, withdrawn.

Following Bills were introduced:

1. The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (Second Amendment) Bill, 2020
2. The National Commission for Allied and Healthcare Professions Bill, 2020

The Aircraft (Amendment) Bill, 2020 - Contd.

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF HOUSING AND URBAN AFFAIRS, THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF CIVIL AVIATION AND THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI HARDEEP SINGH PURI): Civil aviation has been a critical driver of economic growth in India. We have recorded exceptional growth in the last five years. This has made India the third largest civil aviation market domestically and we are in the process of becoming the third largest market for civil aviation globally after the United States and China by 2022 in terms of both domestic as well as international passengers. As of 31st August, 2020, we have about 711 civil registered aircrafts of which 661 passenger aircrafts are operational. This figure is likely to go up to 1200 in the next five years. today, we have 109 operational airports in the country. The UDAN Scheme has greatly helped in developing airport infrastructure. We have an ambitious target of developing and operationalising 100 additional airports in the next five years by the year 2024. We have taken several measures to help the beleaguered civil aviation sector which is under strain. I just propose to insert new definitions defining the three regulatory bodies i.e. DGCS, BCAS and the Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau. They will be provided statutory recognition through these three bodies. The existing penalties for violations under the Act were considered not adequate. It is proposed to increase the existing penalties from upto Rs.10 lakhs to Rs.1 crore. It is proposed that the Central Government appoint a designated officer at Deputy Secretary level for adjudging financial penalties. The thrust of the Bill is to provide a statutory basis to these three important agencies which govern the conduct of Civil Aviation.

SHRI K.C. VENUGOPAL: Thank you, Hon'ble Chairman for giving me the opportunity to participate in the discussion on this legislation. One of the main objectives of this Bill is to ensure safety and security of the passengers and the aerodromes. By this Act, three organizations, DGCA, BCAS and AAIB will be headed by a Director General who will be appointed by the Central Government. The Bill

also gives power to the Central Government for cancelling the licenses, certificates or approvals granted to a person under the Act, if the person contravenes any provision of the Act. India is the third largest civil aviation market in the world. There are greater concerns on the issues of safety measures. The shortage of the ATC officers is another serious concern. According to a recent report, currently, there is a shortage of 25 per cent ATC officers in Delhi alone. I would like to invite the attention of this august House to a real issue of privatization of the airports. Recently the Government has decided to award airports to the private parties. There is an intentional attempt from the Government to do nepotism to help their crony capitalist friends. The Government is laying red carpet for monopolization of airports in the country. In this process, the Government has violated all rules. The recommendations made by the Department of Economic Affairs, DEA, in the Ministry of Finance and the NITI Ayog on the technical, financial and legal aspects of the bidding process were ignored by the Government. The PPP Cell of the DEA recommended that since these six airport development projects are highly capital-intensive, a clause should be incorporated that not more than two airports would be awarded to a single bidder because of the high financial risks involved. The NITI Aayog specifically suggested that the Request For Proposal should include criteria to measure the experience of the bidder in developing airport terminals and related sectors. None of the recommendations made either by the DEA or the NITI Aayog were included in the bid documents. There is a move to monopolise the Indian airports. In future you can see that all airports of India will be owned only by one company. There were anomalies in the eligibility terms and conditions set by AAI for bidders. The airport of Jaipur is different from the airport of Thiruvananthapuram. The clauses were identical. Now the Airport Authority of India has become AAA. That is the move by this Government. Trivandrum and Jaipur are included in these five airports. The land was given by the State Governments. The concern of the State Government has not been taken care of. Both the State Governments opposed this move and Government has not taken the concern of the State Government into consideration. For selling this airport, the Kerala Assembly

unanimously passed a resolution. We are not against PPP model. This is one of the best examples of PPP model in Kochi International Airport where the Chief Minister is the Chairman and CEO is the person appointed by the Chief Minister. You have to study the Kochi model. I am asking for an inquiry into this. This is a clear case of corruption.

SHRI G.V.L. NARASIMHA RAO: Under the leadership of hon. Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, the civil aviation sector has undergone a transformational positive change in the last six years. In just a period of five years the total air passenger traffic has increased by 118 per cent. We have more than double the growth in terms of passenger traffic. This Bill certainly has provisions to ensure that we have affordable and safe aviation for the people of this country. Today, we are the third largest domestic aviation market in the world and we are at fourth or fifth position in terms of international passengers. We are one of the largest and fastest growing civil aviation markets in the world. We were ranked 34th in 2019 by the World Economic Forum's Travel and Tourism Competitive Index. Under the hon. Prime Minister Shri Modi ji's leadership, both travel and tourism sectors have shown a huge improvement. Keeping in view huge expansion of traffic and to enhance airport network and infrastructure and for many other reasons Aircraft Act, 1934 needs to be amended. Last time this Act was amended in 2008. There are 279 operational routes under the UDAN Scheme which are connecting 50 un-served and under-served airports. Today, you can book a ticket for Rs. 1,500. The Government has the target of developing 100 more airports by 2024. Under UDAN, 78 routes have just been announced. This will cover even the remotest parts of the North-Eastern Region. COVID-19 has impacted the aviation sector. As hon. Prime Minister says, we have converted this crisis into an opportunity. The domestic flights suspended operations on March 25th and commenced their operations again on 25th May. Today, we are operating 1117 domestic flights. The corona pandemic has impacted the aviation sector globally. Likewise, we have also been impacted. The hon'ble Prime Minister have launched the Vande Bharat Mission, under which we have brought back a huge number of Indians who wanted to come

back to their country. The Air India itself operated flights to about 72 destinations in 53 countries of the world. We all are passing through very difficult times, but what the Government has done something splendid. We have signed agreements with several countries to operate flights in a reciprocally agreed manner. Testing kits were supplied to the entire country in a record period by using the Lifeline Udaan. There is huge number of operational airports and about Rs. 13,000 crores have come in to develop twelve airports in the form of a private investment under the PPP mode. There is a transparent regime under this Government. The hon. Prime Minister also has a vision to turn India into a global hub of civil aviation. Under this, we have the maintenance, repair, and operations (MRO). The taxation regime has been rationalized for this purpose. A lot of money is going to come by way of foreign exchange. India will become a global hub. We will not only save huge foreign exchange but we will also be creating a number of job opportunities for our youths in this country. The new Policy announced by the Government is going to make air space freely available under Aatma Nirbhar Bharat. I would like to support this Bill.

SHRI DINESH TRIVEDI: I am starting my fifth term and I extend my thanks to Mamata Banerjee ji for this. As a former pilot I know a little bit about civil aviation. I compliment Hardeep Singh ji. Vande Bharat has done wonderful work but we should also mention the migrant labourers. It was Air India who went there. They initially risk their life. So my compliments to the entire team for what they have done. Do not sell the Air India. Air India always stood with us in any distress. India should be at the top level. We have highest growth but what were the reasons to bring this Bill. If you have to proceed then the Aircraft Act, 1934 should be changed completely. You have to change the DGCA at all. should The domain expertise should be there in the DGCA. You have increased the penalty but this may punish the employee but not the airline. The Aircraft Act, 1934 needs to be completely changed. If India needs to progress, we have to bring our promising children sitting in Silicon Valley here. Only then India will become self-reliant.

SHRI PRASANNA ACHARYA: There are certain good provisions in the Bill. Our civil aviation sector has a high growth potential even now. Therefore, we need to modernize and update our legislation in regard to the civil aviation industry. Off and now accidents keep happening in this country. So, we must put more emphasis on the safety and security of the aircraft and air passengers. According to the International Civil Aviation Organization's audit reports, India fared worse than Pakistan and Nepal. We are implementing the UDAN Scheme and new airlines have started their flights. It is therefore necessary to have strict regulations for the upkeep of safety of the passengers. I am happy that certain provisions have been made in the Amendment Bill keeping this aspect in mind. The penalty provision has been increased. I think that is a good feature. DGCA, BCAS, and the AAIB should be given the autonomy to function independently. I want to know whether there can be any appeal in the Court against the verdict of these bodies. We know that after the Covid situation the services of airlines have been banned for a certain time. There has been a drastic reduction in the occupancy rate of Air India and it has been going through the fear that it will be sold off. I want to know when the private airlines are flying to their full capacity, why there has been a drastic reduction in the occupancy rate of the Air India. I support this Bill.

SHRI VISHAMBHAR PRASAD NISHAD: Air India launched the "Vande Bharat Mission". Air staff deserves appreciation as they took risk and provided services to the people during the time of Covid-19. Unfortunately, Air India is being sold. The government has not said anything about the present and retired employees and their facilities. We think it is the turn of trains after Air India. At the time of lockdown, people were not getting the tickets in "Vande Bharat Mission". It should also be seen. Now drones will be operated. They might be used by terrorists too. Keeping security and safety of people in mind, the government has to explain people how to get a license to use drones.

SHRI P. WILSON: This Bill regulates the manufacture, possession, use, operation, sale, import and export of civil aircrafts and licensing of aerodromes. The Bill converts three authorities, namely, the DGCA, the BCAS and the AAIB, as statutory authorities. The DGCA have the power to regulate the aircraft functions. The BCAS has regulatory oversight related to the civil aviation security. The AAIB will carry out investigations related to aircraft accidents. However, the Central Government has one power namely, superintendence over these three authorities. My request would be that the Central Government should not have the power of superintendence over these three bodies. So far as this airport industry is concerned, many private airlines are running into losses, like Jet Airways, Air Deccan, Kingfisher, etc. Therefore, unless the air routes and air fares are regulated and are made affordable to the common man by way of bringing a new Act, you can't see growth in this industry. Chennai is one of the major metropolitan cities in India. It doesn't have an international airport like that of Delhi or Hyderabad. So, I would request that the Chennai Airport should be developed to the international standards. There are other airports that need to be developed in Tamil Nadu, namely, Madurai, Trichy and Coimbatore. Like the National Highways Act, the Government should bring a special enactment so far as acquisition of land for airport sector is concerned so that they can easily acquire the land and establish more airports.

SHRI V. VIJAYASAI REDDY: The Bill proposes to give statutory backing to the DGCA, the BCAS and the AAIB in order to help India in its safety ranking worldwide, and enable us to get more high-revenue routes in the US and other international markets. India is the third-largest in the civil aviation market after China and the United States. Increased air activity, however, has led to near misses which is really a cause of concern, which I hope the Government will definitely address. There are increased cases of accidents, more particularly, on table top runways, short runways and runways in the hilly areas. This is really another cause of concern. I have a few suggestions to give to the Government. First is the convergence of defence and commercial airports. It has caused some problems in

increasing the flight connectivity to the executive capital of Andhra Pradesh. So, I request the Government to address this issue. There are some infirmities in the Bill. The Bill increases the power of the Central Government to have increased control over the sector right from the appointment to framing the rules and regulations of the sector. It gives powers to the Central Government to review the orders passed by these statutory authorities. There is a Commission of Railway Safety which comes under the Ministry of Civil Aviation. When the statutory powers can be given to these three authorities, the same statutory authority can be given in case of railway safety. The Government should have worked for further reforming the Commission of Railway Safety.

SHRI RAM CHANDRA PRASAD SINGH: I support this Bill. All three authorities have been given statutory powers through this Bill. This will definitely increase the safety of the aircraft passengers. The government should take care of international standards in terms of safety, whether it is related to aircraft, passengers, crew, airport runways and airspace. There was a plane crash in Patna. Then the State government and the Central government had agreed to build a new airport outside Patna. Patna Airport should be built in such a way that both security and safety are maintained there. A new flight was also announced from Darbhanga. In this regard, an action should also be taken. If it is launched as soon as possible, the people of North Bihar will be able to catch a flight from there. Similarly, domestic flights can be started from Purnia too. Bhagalpur also has a major airport. It would be nice if work is done within a timeline. This will benefit the passengers of Bihar. Also, an international flight for Gaya should be started, as many Buddhists and other travellers visit there. Flights should also be started for Haj pilgrims. I would like to draw attention of the Government on these points and support this Bill.

SHRIMATI JHARNA DAS BAIDYA: The Bill gives extraordinary power to the Central Government. Already three authorities exist under the Ministry of Civil Aviation. The aim of the present Bill is very clear. All are suspecting that this is another step to

help privatisation of air sector. As of now, there are nearly 12 airports, most of which are profit-making airports. These have been shortlisted for leasing out to the private players by the Government. The social responsibility of Air India is really commendable. When we are privatising it, we should be conscious of the social responsibility of aviation companies. I would like to suggest some points here. One is the issue of high prices of Aviation Turbine Fuel. Airline loans should be restructured. Fuel prices and lack of adequate MROs are some reasons for this. There are drastic cuts in the budgetary allocation to the industry. One point is regarding the air fare during the festive season when general public has to bear very hefty charges. The Bill converts three existing bodies into statutory bodies under the Act. In the Bill, the Central Government may cancel the licence, certificates or approvals granted to a person under the Act unless a complaint is made or there is a previous sanction from the Directorate General of Civil Aviation, BCAS or AAIB. It is against natural justice and it is completely unethical.

PROF. MANOJ KUMAR JHA: The aviation sector has been in turbulence and Government's policy or non-policy framework has actually accentuated this process. The Government should speak to stakeholders while taking decisions with respect to privatization, etc. In recent times, there was a massive cut in the salaries and perks of Air India staff. It was an unreasonable one. When the Government do that, it must look at the families and consider how they would be able to cope with it. Many of them have been fired. When you look at the bidding process in several realms or read the bidding process and the prerequisites, you know the beneficiary. More often than not, the beneficiary does not change. Quid pro quo appears to be an integral and innate part of the policy framework. This Government talks about cooperative federalism and it appears more in the realm of rhetoric. There is a gap of miles between rhetoric and reality. A large number of people in Bihar from different areas want Purnia to be immediately made functional so that flights could take off from there. Patna airport is almost like a tabletop airport. It should be shifted or some other measures should be undertaken. Right from day one, this Government

goes for the lowest hanging fruit. The lowest hanging fruit may be dangerous many a time.

SHRI PRAFUL PATEL: This Bill is important because with the growth of the civil aviation sector the Government also has to bring in all its regulations in line with the international requirements because this sector is truly a globalized sector. But I would like the Government to note that while we are making all these three bodies statutory, we have not been very clear as to how these bodies would be appointed. They may have the powers but we are lacking in specialists. Even in DGCA, there was a time when only technical people would be appointed as the Director-General of Civil Aviation. Now, we do not have so many expert technical people. That is the reason why we are resorting to non-technical people heading these statutory bodies. Therefore, I would urge the Government to look at the process by which it would be appointing people to these important positions. The civil aviation sector will grow rapidly in the coming times. In the future, if 10 to 15 per cent of the people will start travelling by plane once a year, then number of planes will need to increase a lot. If growth is to be sustained, the number of airports in major cities will have to increase. If other new airports will not be built in big cities, then air services will not increase in our country and this will not result in economic growth of our country. Today the financial condition of airlines is very bad. The Government has not announced any bail out package. I think we need to help the civil aviation sector.

SHRI BINOY VISWAM: Our air travel sector is facing a big crisis today because of the Government's policies. The Government believes that the panacea for all the ills is FDI. The Government is bent to privatize everything, their sectors as a whole, their companies, their ports. It is a dangerous move for the nation. And, that stands against the Atmanirbhar Bharat. Salaries of the Staff of Air India are not being paid. The Government is asking them to go on leave for five years. This Government's policy is anti-worker and anti-labour. The bonus of the workers is being cut off and their rights are being cut off and their wages are just peanuts.

SHRI KANAKAMEDALA RAVINDRA KUMAR: The Government has brought this Bill after the need has been pointed out by the international civil organization. Clauses 4A and 4B of the proposed Act are regarding the constitution of two bodies. But, the functions may not be overlapped with regard to the clauses mentioned therein. And, Clause 4C is regarding the investigating agency; it has to be given some quasi-judicial powers in order to conduct an independent investigation. Under Clause 4D, under the guise of the Superintendence, the functions of the body may not be interfered. The Government has to take care of it, to conduct the investigation under Clause 4D. As far as suggestions are concerned, the high-rise buildings near the airports are a major problem for this. The Ministry has to take care of that and resolve that issue. The Ministry has granted approval of Bhogapuram international airport to a corporation limited to set up a new greenfield airport. It was granted in the year 2016, now we are in 2020. The project has not seen any progress. I urge upon the Government to ensure the new airport comes into operation. As far as the Vijayawada airport, Gannavaram, is concerned which is declared as international airport, presently no flights are being operated except in this pandemic period. But still I urge upon the Government to take earnest steps to operate international flights because it is a part of the capital of Andhra Pradesh from the beginning and it requires immediate intervention. Due to pandemic period, so many international flights were taken off from the Gannavaram airport. It shows that it requires enhancing the level of Vijayawada airport as an international airport and see to it that it functions.

SHRI ANIL DESAI: The Government has brought this Bill which will amend the Aircraft Act, 1934 by enhancing the maximum fine limit on regulatory and other lapses found in the aircraft operations. The Bill also enlarges the scope of the existing Act to include regulation of all areas of air navigation. The Bill will enable the three regulatory bodies in the Indian civil aviation sector, namely, the DGCA, the BCAS and the AAIB to become statutory authorities. But the overall superintendence of the same will be under the Central Government. I request the Government to reconsider this provision as

it will affect very badly when you are taking a reform. These amendments will fulfil the requirements of the international civil aviation organisation that has not been rating India very highly on air safety benchmark for quite some time. In the past, there were many incidents that had exposed the poor safety standards and procedures in India's aviation sector. These incidents caused health problems, discomfort, anxiety, and tension for the passengers. By bringing these amendments the Civil Aviation Ministry has taken much needed steps that will ensure the best implementation of the safety standards. Lastly, I would urge upon the Government not to sell Air India which is the national carrier and also revive the Jet Airways at the earliest and save the lives of thousands of its employees.

SHRI SANJAY SINGH: During the COVID-19 pandemic, unemployment has increased in every sector including the airline sector and a large number of people are unemployed. In this Bill, many important steps will be taken in terms of security. The government also wants the common man to travel by plane. There was discussion of Jewar Airport and Sri Ram Airport in Ayodhya. The farmers, whose lands are being acquired for these two airports are not being compensated. Therefore, I would request Hon'ble Minister that farmers should be given compensation at the earliest. Jet Airways employees are facing difficulties due to retrenchment. Many of them have committed suicide. The problem of Jet Airways employees should be noted.

DR. M. THAMBIDURAI: My demand is to expand air services in my area Hosur in Tamil Nadu. The Tamil Nadu Government has given consent to operate the UDAN Service from Hosur. It is very essential to see to it that UDAN Service is operated there because we are having a beautiful airport. Even though it is under private firm, it has come forward to offer their services to the Aviation Sector. Therefore the Government is requested to operate Udan Service in Hosur.

LT. GEN. (DR.) D.P. VATS (RETD.): Hon'ble Deputy Chairman, I congratulate you for being re-elected. Vande Bharat Mission is a record evacuation operation in the history of mankind. It

has broken our own records of evacuation from Kuwait. India is a signatory to Chicago Convention. Some minor amendments have been carried out in the 1934 Act from time to time. we are giving these three bodies quasi-judicial powers to make them more powerful. There should be unity of command and in unity of command, Government's say should be final because the responsibility of the Government is final. There is one more thing which I would like to bring to the notice of this august House that the Armed Forces have been exempted from the Bill. I will request the hon'ble Minister to continue that tradition. This will improve our rating in the international rating.

SHRI VIVEK K. TANKHA: I would like to thank the Hon'ble Minister for extending full support to the students and other Indian stranded abroad. I have four points. The first is about the Statement of Objects and Reasons which talks about the safety audit conducted by the International Civil Aviation Organisation. India's safety score was 89 per cent. India score declined to 57.44 per cent, from 89. This is the poorest score India has recorded even in ICAO audit in recent time. Another point is that as per Schedule VI of the Aircraft Act, 1934 and Rules of 1937, there are 83 offences with different penalties . In December 2019, I asked a question that if DGCA has taken any action against operators who have been found to have deficiencies. The answers showed that no penalties were imposed. If the penalty is not being imposed, there is no need to enhance it. I would like to have an answer from the Minister. Today we are talking of safety standards. Safety standards will only go up if attitude is fair. Director-Generals are appointed under the amended sections. A pilot or an expert civil aviation person must be at the helm of affairs. We must also start implementing the same. These amendments may be all right, but at the end when the government has never imposed Rs. 10 lakhs, it would not like to impose Rs. one crore. The allocation for the Ministry of Civil Aviation is getting reduced. If the Ministry is not going to get a good financial budget, it will not run smoothly. It will not be able to fill up its vacancies. These amendments will prove useless.

SHRI HARSHVARDHAN SINGH DUNGARPUR: I would like to congratulate you on your second innings as the Deputy Chairman. The amendments would fulfill the requirements of International Civil Aviation Organisation which is a UN body. According to the latest reports, India has been placed under Category-I of ICAO Report. The audit conducted by ICAO indicate the need to amend the Act and give proper recognition to regulators to enhance maximum quantum of fines. So, the penalties are proposed to be increased by ten-fold from Rs. 10 lakhs to Rs. 1 crore. There is also a two-year imprisonment proposed in the Bill. The Government needs to amend the parent Act after spike of a number of air safety violations. We need to expand the tabletop runways. There are many airstrips lying unused all over the country. All such unused airstrips need to be utilized. We also need to encourage seaplanes. Lastly, the airports, which handle maximum tourism, like Jaipur and Goa, need to be upgraded. Also, in Rajasthan, the airports of Bikaner, Jodhpur and Jaisalmer need to be upgraded. With these words, I support the Amendment Bill.

The hon'ble Minister, replying to the debate, said: I want to start by thanking each one of the hon'ble Members who who have participated in the discussion on the Bill. I am deeply grateful to them. I would try to respond to each of the points made by the hon'ble Members. Coming to the issue of privatization, I would recommend to the hon'ble Member to look at the issue of privatization in a historical context. It is a fact that two of our major airports were successfully privatized in the year 2006 under the then political dispensation. Both those privatization processes have actually resulted in our being able to get the resources to develop the rest of the airport infrastructure in the country. Mumbai and Delhi, two privatised airports account for 33 per cent of our traffic and our earnings. Now, as far as there is discussion in terms of six airports being given to one entity. In fact, when the bids for these six airports were received, they were all in close with this thing. Now we come to the issue of privatisation of one particular airport which is generating a lot of excitement. This is the privatisation of one particular airport in the State of Kerala. There was a discussion between the Government of the State of Kerala, the NITI

Aayog and the Empowered Group of Secretaries. When the sealed bids were opened, the gap between the highest bidder and the State of Kerala was not 10 per cent, it was 19.3 per cent. Now that particular entity to whom something is said, that entity is running a successful port or constructing a successful port from within a proximate distance of where this airport is. The audit reports, which are the reason why we are bringing these amendments in, relate to the period 2012 and 2015. The European Safety Agency has placed India in Category I State. This Government will not compromise on issues of safety. After the Modi Government has come in, after 2014, many statistics can be put forth which prove that we have not compromise with the safety. I want to assure this House that the domestic civil aviation will resume to pre-Covid levels by the end of this calendar year. We have succeeded in the Vande Bharat Mission. I say with a great degree of satisfaction and humility that the total number of Indian citizens who were stranded abroad and have been brought back is close to 1.6 million or 16 lakhs. This is the largest and most comprehensive process of evacuation and repatriation of Indian citizens, or citizens of any country, at any time in history. Our pilots, our air crew and our ground people were in the frontline. An air operation like this cannot be carried out through donations or the Gurudwara Langar Society; that has to be paid. The amount we charged was the lowest ever. What is important to note is that there was pent up demand, when the entire country was under lockdown since 23rd March. Due to this the problems were there. Some of my colleagues must realize that the choice is between privatization and closing down.

The motion for consideration of the Bill was adopted.

Clauses etc., were adopted.

The Bill, was passed.

The Institute of Teaching and Research in Ayurveda Bill, 2020

THE MINISTER OF HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE; THE MINISTER OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY; AND THE MINISTER OF EARTH SCIENCES (DR. HARSH VARDHAN), moving the motion for consideration of the Bill, said: This Bill is about creation of a new Institute of teaching and research in Ayurveda in Jamnagar and this institute has to be declared as an institute of national importance. This is for promotion of quality and excellence in education in Ayurveda and also to promote research and training in Ayurveda and allied disciplines. This is going to be the first institution in the country in the field of Ayurveda to be given a status of an institution of national importance. This is the only institution where Ph.D and PG courses are available.

DR. L. HANUMANTHAI AH: The background of this Bill states the aim of establishing this Institute, that is to provide international level of education and training in Ayurveda. Ayurveda is an ancient medical system. But, it is facing a big challenge after the development of scientific medicines. We need to improve the Ayurvedic medicines and Ayurvedic practices and promote research into it. There is a shortage of Ayurved teachers at post-graduate level in our country and the research is also not being done at the expected level. It is a welcome step that three Members of Parliament are going to be nominated as members of this Institute, two from Lok Sabha and one from Rajya Sabha. If you make a list of all institutes in Ayurveda and put in place a national-level governing body and then monitor the research institutes across the country, then you can definitely contribute to Ayurveda and research also. My other question here is why this is only in Gujarat. Kerala is number one in Ayurveda. I wanted to emphasize with the Government that standardization of research methodologies, including evidence based research in Ayurveda, is very important. At present, Rashtriya Ayurveda Vidyapeeth is the only faculty development programme available in the field of Ayurveda. But these programmes are suffering from repetition of the material. The examination, the evaluation methods,

skills used in it are criticised as obsolete. Just relying on traditional methods may not give results and also, may not compete with other systems of medicines which is known to be of global standards. The Ayurveda graduates are jobless today. The Government must see and evaluate how to accommodate the Ayurveda graduates while releasing them as graduates every year. Besides, there is no coordination between Ayurveda researchers and bio-science researchers with national-level institutes like the Indian Institute of Science. I request the Government to see that this post-graduate research institute not only takes up teaching and research but also conducts clinical trials, particularly in Kerala, Karnataka and preferably in Maharashtra and West Bengal.

Discussion not concluded.

STATEMENT BY THE MINISTER

Covid-19 Pandemic and the Steps Taken by the Government of India

THE MINISTER OF HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE; THE MINISTER OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY; AND THE MINISTER OF EARTH SCIENCES (DR. HARSH VARDHAN): I have briefed this august house on two earlier occasions once in February and again in March this year on the Covid Pandemic. I would again like to brief the Hon'ble members on the current situation of Covid-19 Pandemic and the actions taken by the Government of India.

Since my last briefing, WHO declared COVID-19 a pandemic and asked all countries to take urgent and aggressive action against this public health crisis.

As on 11th September, 2020, 215 countries/territories worldwide are affected. As per WHO, there are more than 2.79 crore confirmed cases across the world with more than 9.05 lakh deaths, with a case fatality rate of 3.2%.

As on 11th September, 2020, a total of 45,62,414 confirmed cases and 76,271 deaths (Case Fatality Rate 1.67%) have been reported in India. As many as 35,42,663 (77.65%) cases have recovered. The maximum cases and deaths have been primarily reported from Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, West Bengal, Bihar, Telangana, Odisha, Assam, Kerala & Gujarat. All these States have reported more than one lakh cases. With our endeavor to manage COVID-19 through a whole of government & whole of society approach, India has been able to limit its cases and deaths per million to 3,328 cases per million and 55 deaths per million population respectively, which is one of the lowest in the world as compared to similarly affected countries.

Many of the epidemiological parameters such as mode of transmission, subclinical infection, period of virus shedding, role of immunity etc. are still being researched. Once a person is exposed to the infection, the disease may develop anytime between 1-14 days. The main symptoms of Covid are fever, cough, and difficulty in breathing. In our country about 92% of the cases are reported to be having mild disease. In only about 5.8 % of cases where oxygen therapy is required and the disease may be severe enough to require intensive care in only 1.7% cases.

The increasing magnitude of this outbreak in India called for a pre-emptive, pro-active, graded, whole-of-government, whole-of-society approach, built around a comprehensive strategy to prevent infections, save lives and minimize impact.

The Government of India undertook the COVID-19 challenge with the highest level of political commitment. The nationwide lockdown, a bold decision, undertaken by Government duly involving community, initiated as self-imposed Junta Curfew as per the call given by Hon'ble Prime Minister is testimony to the fact that India has collectively stood up to manage COVID-19 and successfully blunted the aggressive progression of COVID. It has been estimated that this decision prevented approximately 14–29 lakh cases and 37–78 thousand deaths. Further, these four months were utilized to create additional health infrastructure, enhance human resource and produce

within India critical elements such as PPEs, N-95 masks and ventilators. A case in point is increase in dedicated isolation beds 36.3 times and dedicated ICU beds above 24.6 times to what existed in March 2020. Whereas there was no indigenous manufacturing of PPE, with the requisite standards, at that point in time, we are now self-sufficient and, in a position, to even export the same. On behalf of our countrymen, I take this opportunity to congratulate our Hon'ble Prime Minister, Sh. Narendra Modi, who personally continues to monitor the situation and provided his leadership.

Government of India has initiated a series of actions to prevent entry of the disease and to contain it. I am daily reviewing the situation. Hon'ble Prime Minister himself has interacted with the Chief Ministers of all States and UT administrations and all stakeholders to regularly understand issues and collaborate with the States for effective Covid management. Group of Ministers under my Chairmanship consisting of Minister of External Affairs, Minister of Civil Aviation and Minister of State for Home Affairs, Minister of State for Shipping and Minister of State for Health & Family Welfare have met 20 times since its inception on 3rd February, 2020. Committee of Secretaries under Cabinet Secretary has taken regular reviews with all related Ministries of Health, Defence, Ministry of External Affairs, Civil Aviation, Home, Textiles, Pharma, Commerce and other officials including with State Chief Secretaries.

Under the overall guidance of Hon'ble Prime Minister, Ministry of Home Affairs, Govt. of India has constituted 11 Empowered Groups on 29th March 2020 on different aspects of COVID-19 management in the country to take informed decisions on issues ranging from (i) medical emergency planning, (ii) availability of hospitals, isolation and quarantine facility, disease surveillance and testing, (iii) ensuring availability of essential medical equipment, (iv) augmenting human resource and capacity building, (v) supply chain and logistic management, (vi) coordination with private sector, (vii) economic and welfare measures, (viii) information, communications and public awareness, (ix) technology and data management, (x) public grievance and (xi) strategic issues related to lockdown. These

groups have recently been restructured on 10th September based on the need and evolving scenario.

My own Ministry is constantly reviewing the evolving scenario. Video conferences are being held with States regularly. We have held 63 video conferences so far with State Health Ministers, Health functionaries and district level officials. The Joint Monitoring Group (JMG) under the Chairmanship of DGHS which advises MoHFW on technical matters has met 40 times till now to assess the risk, review the preparedness & response mechanisms and finalize technical guidelines.

Government of India, based on its experience of successfully managing pandemics and epidemics in the past, provided the requisite strategy, plans and procedures to the State Governments and UT administrations. This includes containment plans and guidelines on a wide range of subjects related to travel, behavioral & psycho-social health, surveillance, laboratory support, hospital infrastructure, clinical management, rational use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) etc. including inspirational guidance for healthcare personnel.

Government of India has also taken several other measures to contain/suppress the transmission of Covid. First Travel Advisory was issued on 17th January, 2020 and as situation evolved, the travel advisories were revised in a graded manner. Universal screening of passengers from all countries was introduced and up to 23rd March, 2020 (till suspension of all commercial flights), a total of 14,154 flights with 15,24,266 passengers were screened at the airports. In addition to airports, about 16.31 lakh persons were screened at land border crossings and about 86,379 persons were screened at 12 major, 65 minor sea ports.

Presently Government of India has advised no scheduled international commercial passenger aircraft be allowed to take off from any foreign airport for any airport in India, from March 22, 2020 except under Vande Bharat Mission on May 7th 2020, which aims to bring home stranded Indians in many countries due to Covid-19 pandemic. Temporary air travel arrangements (Transport Bubbles)

between India and 9 other mutually consenting countries aimed at restarting commercial passenger services have commenced. They are reciprocal in nature, meaning airlines from both countries enjoy similar benefits. A 'Guidelines for International arrivals' has also been issued by the Ministry on 24th May, 2020, which were revised on 2nd August, 2020.

Prior to the lockdown 1.0, Government of India evacuated Indian nationals from Wuhan in China, Diamond Princess Cruise Ship, Japan, Iran, Italy and Malaysia. Under Vande Bharat Mission, as reported on 11th September, 2020, a total of 12,69,172 passengers have been brought back to India.

Community surveillance was initiated initially for travel related cases and subsequently for cases being reported from community by Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP). As on 11th September 2020, a total of about 40 lakh persons have been kept under surveillance and extensive contact tracing of all positive cases is regularly being undertaken through disease surveillance network so as to break the chain of transmission.

Ministry of Health & Family Welfare released containment plans to contain cluster and large outbreaks on 2nd March and 4th April, 2020 respectively and these plans were updated from time to time. The containment plans envisage a strategy of breaking the chain of transmission by (i) defining containment and buffer zones, (ii) applying strict perimeter control, (iii) intensive active house to house search for cases and contacts, (iv) isolation and testing of suspect cases and high risk contacts, (v) quarantine of high risk contacts, (vi) intensive risk communication to raise community awareness on simple preventive measures and need for prompt treatment seeking and (vii) strengthening of passive Influenza Like Illness (ILI)/ Severe Acute Respiratory Illness (SARI) surveillance in containment and buffer zones.

With the evolving scenario, laboratory network is continuously being strengthened. From a situation of a single laboratory equipped to undertake testing for Covid in January,

presently 1705 laboratories are conducting COVID-19 Testing. Laboratories have been established in difficult terrains like Ladakh, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland as well as other North Eastern states, Lakshadweep and Andaman & Nicobar island. Currently the testing is about 1 million tests a day (which translates to 720 tests per million population per day), much higher than that stipulated by WHO which is 140 tests per million population per day. A total of 5,51,89,226 samples have been tested so far as on 11th September 2020. While there were no indigenous manufacturers of laboratory diagnostics or testing machines for Covid, today we have an indigenous production capacity of more than 10 lakh kits/day.

For appropriate management of COVID-19 cases, a three tier arrangement of health facilities [(i) COVID Care Center with isolation beds for mild or pre-symptomatic cases; (ii) Dedicated COVID Health Centre (DCHC) with oxygen supported isolation beds for moderate cases and (iii) Dedicated COVID Hospital (DCH) with ICU beds for severe cases] has been implemented. Tertiary care hospitals under ESIC, Defence, Railways, paramilitary forces, Steel Ministry etc. have been leveraged for case management.

As on 12th September, 2020, a total of 15,284 COVID treatment facilities with 13,14,646 dedicated isolation bed without O₂ have been created. Also, a total of 2,31,093 oxygen supported isolation beds and 62,717 ICU beds (including 32,575 ventilator beds) have been created. Constant monitoring of the disease trend, analysis of available infrastructure and planning in advance for the future has averted a major crisis as was faced by many developed countries. In addition, a total of 12,826 quarantine centres with 5,98,811 beds have been created.

Guidelines on Clinical management of COVID-19 were issued and regularly updated & widely circulated. These include case definition, prevention of infection control, laboratory diagnosis, early supporting therapy, management of severe cases and complications. No specific antivirals have been proven effective so far. Symptomatic treatment for fever and cough, appropriate rehydration, supplemental oxygen therapy remains the mainstay of treatment. We have re-

purposed the drug Hydroxychloroquine for mild (but high-risk cases) and for moderate cases. This was done with limited scientific evidence but well acknowledging that this drug has been used widely in India for other ailments where it is used for prolonged periods of time, with good safety profile.

In addition, provisions for investigational therapies has also been made for using Remdesivir, Convalescent plasma and Tocilizumab for managing severe cases under close medical supervision.

With the intent to ensure dissemination of these standard treatment protocols and reduce mortality to maximum extent, a number of initiatives have been launched. An AIIMS Corona helpline 9971876591 has been started to guide the doctors on medical management. AIIMS Delhi is running the COVID-19 National Teleconsultation Centre (CoNTeC) which can be reached by calling +91-9115444155. It is catering to doctors, from anywhere in the country, who want to consult AIIMS faculty for the management of COVID-19 patients, as well as to the public in general. Telemedicine guidelines have been issued on 25.03.2020 to provide tele-consultation to patients for mitigation of their illness and prevention of crowding in clinics. It may also help in triage, treatment and counseling for care of ill patients by healthcare providers in areas with limited access.

A clinical Center of Excellence (CoE) initiative has also been launched by Ministry of Health & FW with AIIMS, Delhi as apex nodal institution and State level CoEs to provide guidance on clinical management protocols. Weekly webinars are being organized by AIIMS to guide these State level CoEs on crucial clinical issues that doctors may require guidance on managing Covid cases. These State level CoEs are expected to further disseminate these in their districts.

To ensure accessibility of quality treatment for both Covid and non-Covid health issues, to far flung areas, use of telemedicine has been promoted in a big way. 'eSanjeevani', a web-based comprehensive telemedicine solution is being utilized (in23states) to

extend the reach of specialized healthcare services to masses in both rural areas and isolated communities.

ICMR is establishing a National Clinical Registry on COVID that will provide insights into clinical course of COVID-19 disease, its spectrum and outcome of patients.

Thirteen clinical trials of repurposed drugs and harnessing of traditional knowledge using the modern medicine approach are building a portfolio of therapeutic options for Covid-19 patients. Phase 2 clinical trial of immunomodulator Sepsivac has been completed successfully. Phase 2 clinical trial of the first-ever phytopharmaceutical ACQH is underway. One prophylactic trial of Aswagandha and three trials of Guduchi + Pippali; Yashtimadhu; and polyherbal AYUSH drug (AYUSH-64) are planned on moderately ill Covid19 patients.

An effective vaccine would be the sure shot tool in armamentarium against this disease. On this front, globally, there are around 145 candidate vaccines in preclinical evaluation and currently 35 vaccines in clinical trial. In India, a major focus has been on facilitating the development of COVID19 vaccine. More than 30 vaccine candidates have been supported which are in different stages of development, 3 candidates are in advanced stage of Phase I/II/III trials and more than 4 are in advanced pre-clinical development stage.

COVID19 Biorepositories have been setup, which have collected more than 40,000 samples which have been made available to researchers and industry for developing diagnostics, therapeutics and vaccines.

To coordinate procurement and distribution of Covid vaccine, Government of India has constituted a National Expert Group on Vaccine Administration for COVID-19 on 7th August, 2020, under the Chairmanship of Member (Health), NITI Ayog.

Ministry of AYUSH has contributed through various measures for the management and mitigation of Covid-19. The Ministry recommended guidelines of self-care for preventive health measures and boosting immunity. Ministry of AYUSH has also issued

health advisories from different systems of medicine on prophylaxis and immunity promotion which was translated into eight foreign languages and circulated to Indian Embassies. Various AYUSH Hospitals were designated as quarantine centres, isolation centres, Covid Care Centres and Covid Health Centres. Around 8.5 lakh Ayush healthcare professionals have been registered on covidwarriors.gov.in. Ministry of AYUSH has formed an “Inter-disciplinary AYUSH R&D Task Force”. The Task Force has formulated and designed clinical research protocols for AYUSH prophylactic studies and add-on interventions in COVID-19 positive cases. AYUSH-CSIR collaborative studies were initiated with AYUSH medicines for prophylaxis/treatment. A largescale population-based study through AYUSH Research Councils and National Institutes under the Ministry on prophylaxis of AYUSH interventions in targeted populations in containment zones is underway. Ministry of AYUSH has also initiated impact assessment of effectiveness, acceptance and usage of AYUSH advisories & measures in prevention of COVID 19 through a mobile application app known as AYUSH-Sanjivani app.

States have been requested to assess the stock of their logistic, particularly Personal Protective Equipment and procure the same. Total orders for 1.92 crore PPEs have been placed by the Central Government so far. The Ministry has already supplied 1.39 Crore PPE Kits and 3.43 crore N95 masks to States (as on 11th September, 2020).

Department of Pharmaceuticals increased the production of drug hydroxychloroquine manifold. As on 11th September, 2020, MoHFW has issued 10.84 crore tablets of Hydroxychloroquine to States/UTs. India has also exported it to more than 140 countries.

The Central Government has already issued orders to purchase 60,948 ventilators to meet any contingencies. As on 11th September 2020, 32,109 ventilators have been allocated to States of which 30,170 have been delivered. The country is self-sufficient in oxygen and oxygen cylinders. Ministry of Health & Family Welfare has procured & supplied 1,02,400 oxygen cylinders to various

States/UTs so far. In addition, oxygen concentrators are also being supplied to States.

One of the major challenges was to identify and train a large number of Covid warriors across sectors and departments that can be involved in not only COVID related work but also for ensuring maintenance of other essential medical services. Pooling manpower resources has been done from Defence, AYUSH, NCC, NSS, NYK, public sector enterprises, and private sector.

In spite of various constraints and challenges, the Covid warriors rose to the occasion in serving humanity. The country feels indebted to the doctors, nurses, paramedics, frontline field workers, security and police personnel, sanitary workers, volunteers and journalists who have worked tirelessly to protect our countrymen from Covid. I would request the August House to place on record the appreciation for the yeoman services delivered by them.

There had been instances where healthcare service personnel had to face harassment, acts of violence, intimidation and danger to life during discharge of their duties. To overcome this and support their efforts, Government of India promulgated Epidemic Diseases (Amendment) Ordinance, 2020 on 22nd April 2020.

To build the capacities of human resources including the medical manpower who help managing patients in hospitals; as well as non-medical personnel and field workers involved in surveillance, logistics etc., modules have been made available on iGOT - Diksha (online platform) by DOPT (<https://igot.gov.in/igot/>). The training modules have been translated to regional languages. Close to 29.15 lakh people have registered for various courses. This includes 5,699 doctors, 86,018 Ayush Professionals, 4,102 Nurses, 963 Allied Health Professionals, 5,881 frontline workers, 2,70,736 volunteers and 25,42,892 other participants. About 18.96 lakh course completions have taken place on iGOT – Diksha platform. Training Resources for medical and non-medical personnel have also been made available on the website of Ministry of Health & Family Welfare.

We have now moved from ‘managing travel related cases’ to containing clusters and large outbreaks due to local transmission to wide spread of infection to urban, peri-urban and rural areas. This would require concerted effort by the Government with people’s participation to prevent large scale morbidity and mortality. Equally crucial is to maintain the success achieved in management of reproductive maternal and child health, vaccine preventable diseases, non-communicable diseases, tuberculosis, vector borne diseases such as Kala Azar and Malaria. Hence there is an increased thrust for managing non-Covid essential services.

MoHFW website is being updated daily to provide general public with information on current status of COVID-19 spread in India. Regular press releases are being issued and press briefings are being held.

Communication material and toolkits have been developed (pamphlets, poster, audio and AV films) and provided to the States/UTs on COVID-19 disease, preventive steps required to be taken by the communities, handling of myths and stigma related to disease and to widely publicize the helpline numbers available. Communication material is also being hosted on MoHFW website and through social media. Dos and Don’ts are being widely circulated through SMS (550 crore SMSs have been sent). Caller-tune messages are being sent to telecom subscribers in 13 languages and 117 crore subscribers have been reached.

A dedicated call center / helpline (1075) had been started in the initial days to guide community at large which is being used by the citizens very effectively and on a regular basis. A total of 41.04 lakh calls have been received so far.

Department of Bio Technology, Department of Science and Technology, CSIR and Department of Health Research covered the entire chain of scientific and technological solutions holistically for COVID-19 through academia, R&D labs, industry, startups and NGOs. These solutions include basic scientific studies on the behavior, transmission and effects of virus, mathematical modeling of

the pandemic, and products such as the world class ventilators, diagnostic kits, vaccines, therapeutics, antiviral coatings, disinfectants, PPEs, masks, mobile testing booths and hospitals, artificial intelligence based tools, and information dissemination to masses.

For these purposes, a comprehensive mapping of our entire startup ecosystem was done to identify and support over 110 technology startups and over 20 industries for commercial production. Over 150 projects in all areas of virus behavior have been initiated.

Government of India is regularly coordinating with WHO headquarters, regional office and country office to get updates on evolving scenario. Government of India has also provided support to other countries in tackling the challenge posed by the Covid. India has played a major role in shaping up G20 and BRICS response to Covid. India is also extending support wherever required to neighboring SAARC countries.

The Government is proactively identifying gaps and building an Atmanirbhar Bharat that will be able to take challenges of similar pandemics, epidemics and disasters in future. An Expenditure Finance Memorandum of Rs. 65,560.98 Crores under Prime Minister AtmanirbharSwasth Bharat Yojana for strengthening is under consideration. This includes investment in research, healthcare and public health infrastructure with particular focus on pandemic management.

I would urge allHon'ble members of Parliament that battle for Covid is still far from over. On one hand, when we are in stage of Unlock so as to revive economy, and have a balanced approach, it is important that sustained community support is ensured consistently to control the spread of Covid infection & break its chain of transmission.

Your support is crucial to create awareness in your respective constituencies for Covid Appropriate Behaviour. The simple public health measures of wearing of mask/face covers, frequent handwashing, respiratory etiquettes, and physical distancing “2-gaj

kidoori” as a social vaccine, if practiced in a responsible manner, will help us control/suppress the transmission of Covid.

I wish to inform this house that the Government is taking all necessary measures to prevent spread of the COVID in India.

(Statement made and the Minister to reply later.)

Desh Deepak Verma,
Secretary-General.

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**ERRATA TO THE SYNOPSIS OF DEBATE
DATED 14TH SEPTEMBER, 2020**

Page No.	Line No.	Correction
29	8	Read ' <i>The motion moved by Shri Jagat Prakash Nadda was adopted</i> ' for ' <i>The motion was adopted</i> '.