RAJYA SABHA

*SYNOPSIS OF DEBATE

(Proceedings other than Questions and Answers)

Wednesday, December 04, 2024/ Agrahayana 13, 1946 (Saka)

BIRTHDAY GREETINGS

MR. CHAIRMAN: Hon'ble Members, I am pleased to extend greetings to hon. Member of Parliament, **Shri Milind Murli Deora** on his birthday today. Shri Deora is a Member of this august House since April, 2024, representing the State of Maharashtra and is serving currently as the Chairman of the Committee on Subordinate Legislation of Rajya Sabha. A two-term Member of Lok Sabha consecutively. Shri Deora had the distinction of being one of the youngest Members of Parliament at the age of 27 when he was first elected in 2004 and later in 2009 from Mumbai South, a constituency represented in Lok Sabha three times by his late father, Shri Murli Deora.

In his second term, Milind rose to become the Union Minister of State for Communication and Information Technology with an additional portfolio of Shipping. A business graduate from Boston University, Shri Deora is also the founder of Sparsh, the NGO dedicated to empowering underprivileged students through ICT skills. He is an accomplished guitarist with several public performances to his credit. Shri Deora comes from an illustrious family. His father, Shri Murli Deora had remarkable public life making monumental contributions in various positions, a former Cabinet Minister, a Member of this House as well as also of Lok Sabha and he kept his relations across all parties, something which is fundamental. I have had the good occasion and fortune to be a Member of Parliament along with his father and known the family for over four decades. Shri Milind Deora is married to Shrimati Pooja Shetty, a successful entrepreneur in the entertainment industry and the couple is blessed with daughter - Miraya. On behalf of this House, I wish him a long, healthy and happy life and extend greetings to his family members.

MATTERS RAISED WITH THE PERMISSION OF THE CHAIR

1. Need to Address the Problem of Drug Addiction among Children

SHRI MADAN RATHORE: Today, there is an indirect conspiracy to destroy the youth generation of this country. MD drug is being served to the young generation. Many types of movements are going on in Punjab for de-addiction. Many such experiments are going on to save children from this. The Government launched an umbrella scheme in 2020 to deal with drug abuse. The Government is making efforts in this direction. More than 8,000 master volunteers have been engaged, who will give such training to people so that they can

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

work to save the youth from this. I request that there should be a provision for strict punishment in this regard.

(Shri Jose K. Mani, Dr. John Brittas and Shri Rambhai Harjibhai Mokariya associated.)

2. Need to Amend the DOPT Sports Casual Leave Order dated 16.07.1985

SHRIMATI P.T. USHA: It is heartening to witness the support extended to our talented sports persons facilitating their inclusion in various Government organizations. The existing policy outlined in DOPT Office Order dated 16.07.1985 restricting Special Casual Leave to thirty days appears to be inadequate for proper training and development of these athletes. Such a restrictive policy has led numerous sports persons to either halt their sports career or withdraw from active sports. The Indian Railways offer Special Casual Leaves and incentives, such as, cash awards, out-of-turn promotions, and increments to meritorious athletes to boost their morale.

(Several hon'ble Members associated.)

3. Need to Address the Issues Related to Environmental Protection

DR. DINESH SHARMA: Conservation of water, air and environment is extremely necessary to maintain the existence of the earth. Serious environmental crises are becoming more complex due to our lifestyle, industrial pollution and uncontrolled urbanization. Water harvesting should be promoted for water conservation and indiscriminate cutting of trees should be stopped. We should increase awareness towards protecting water and environment by making small changes in our daily routine. I urge the Government to pay serious attention to this issue and take necessary steps, so that we can create a clean, healthy and safe environment not only for the present generation but also for the future generations.

(Several hon'ble Members associated.)

4. Need for Banking Sector Reforms in India

DR. ASHOK KUMAR MITTAL: According to RBI, currently there are 16 crore current accounts and 220 crore savings accounts in the country and there are deposits of Rs 27 lakh crore in both of these. Due to the selfishness of the banks, the common man is not getting his rightful share on the deposits. People who are rich get an average interest of 7 percent on FD. Those who are poor, like farmers etc., get only 2.5 percent interest on an average. One-third of the FD is received on savings account and zero is received on current account. Both our private sector banks and government banks are together making profits. I request the Government that in public interest, under Section 7 of the RBI Act, the interest on savings account should be made equal to the interest on FD.

(Several hon'ble Members associated.)

5. Demand to Increase the Amount of Financial Assistance Given under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Gramin (PMAY-G) from Rs. 1.30 Lakh to Rs. 2 Lakh

SHRI IRANNA KADADI: In the last 10 years, 2 crore, 64 lakh rural houses have been constructed under 'Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Gramin'. The Government has increased the minimum area to 25 square meters under this scheme. Along with this, the assistance per unit has been increased to Rs. 1,20,000 in general area and Rs. 1,30,000 in hilly and remote areas. The Government has announced to build 2 crore additional houses in rural areas in the next 5 years. This is a big step towards meeting the housing needs of the increasing population and new families. In view of the current economic situation and the increase in construction cost, it is necessary that the financial assistance given through this

scheme should be further increased. This will improve the quality of this scheme and the poor in the rural area will get more benefits. I request that the financial assistance provided through 'Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana - Gramin' should be reviewed and the per unit assistance given should be increased to Rs. 2,00,000 as per the current requirement, so that families living in rural areas can get housing.

(Shri Jose K. Mani, Shri R. Girirajan, Shri Dhananjay Bhimrao Mahadik and Shri Ajit Kumar Bhuyan associated.)

6. Demand for Taking Preventive Measures to Combat with Devastating Flood Situation in Assam

SHRI RAMESWAR TELI: Floods occur every year in Assam. There are hilly states around Assam and their water enters Assam due to which Assam is flooded every year and thousands of people become homeless and there is loss of life and property. Therefore, I urge the Government to provide a permanent and long-term solution to reduce the suffering of the people of Assam.

(Dr. Fauzia Khan, Shri Niranjan Bishi and Shri R. Girirajan associated.)

7. Demand for Expediting Construction Work of Road Connecting Kherwara to Swaroopganj in Rajasthan at NH-927-A

SHRI CHUNNILAL GARASIYA: I am demanding immediate construction of the incomplete road between Kherwada to Swarupganj on National Highway 927-A. I want to draw the attention of the Government to a serious problem of the tribal area Bamanwada located in the Udaipur division of Rajasthan. The Government had earlier announced the construction of National Highway No. 927-A in Udaipur, which was to be built from Swarupganj, Rajasthan to Ratlam, Madhya Pradesh. The road from Bavalwada to Kherwada has been built. But, the work on the 45 km long road between Kherwada and Swarupganj is not yet complete, due to which road accidents happen every day. I demand that the 45 km long road between Kherwada and Swarupganj should be constructed as soon as possible.

(Shri Kesridevsinh Jhala, Shri Devendra Pratap Singh and Shri Banshilal Gurjar associated.)

8. Need to address Challenges faced by Small and Micro Enterprises of Goa due to Inefficient Banking System

SHRI SADANAND MHALU SHET TANAVADE: I rise to draw the attention of this august House to a critical issue affecting Goa's small and micro enterprises, which form the backbone of the State's economy and employment generation. Despite substantial deposit held by banks in Goa, credit disbursement remains alarmingly low with the Credit-Deposit ratio significantly below the national average. Nationalized banks in Goa are failing to meet lending targets under important Government schemes. Aspiring entrepreneurs and youth are facing challenges which limit their access to essential credit. Additionally, educational loans are also under disbursed, leaving many students without crucial financial support. This cautious risk-averse approach by banks is affecting Goa's economic growth, limiting job creation and hindering industrial development. While Goa boasts a robust banking network, it remains inadequate in meeting the financial needs of priority sectors. It is essential for banks in Goa to reassess their approach and improve their credit distribution policies, which could lead to more opportunities for job creation and industrial expansion in Goa. Timely intervention will empower Goa's small business to flourish, generate employment and contribute significantly to both the State and nation's economy. I request immediate action on

this issue and also for providing solution to the challenges faced by small businesses and individuals in Goa.

(Dr. Fauzia Khan and Shri R. Girirajan associated.)

9. Need to Address the Problem of Drinking Water in India

DR. K. LAXMAN: The Government has made significant strides in improving drinking water access through various initiatives. The Jal Jeevan Mission aims to provide tap water to every rural household, which has directly contributed to improving the drinking water in rural areas and overall sanitation health of rural communities. Millions of people in India are facing high to extreme water stress and several cities are projected to face severe groundwater depletion by 2030. Renowned water expert, Shri T. Hanumantharao's 'Four Waters' concept was implemented in a village, Gottigari Palli. It has been consistently providing not only safe drinking water to all the nearby villages, but also water to irrigate three crops in a year. The concept was totally ignored by the successive Governments. However, BJP Government in Rajasthan implemented watershed programme based on Hanumantha Rao concept covering lakhs of acres and providing safe drinking water which has transformed the 'maru bhoomi' Rajasthan. I appeal to the Government to focus on measures such as Four Waters concept and rainwater harvesting and nationwide campaigns focussing on water conservation.

(Several hon'ble Members associated.)

10. Need to Promote Medical Tourism in India

SHRIMATI DARSHANA SINGH: Today, medical tourism has become a major industry growing rapidly across the world where patients coming from other countries get high quality services at affordable prices. Today, a large number of foreign tourists come to India for treatment in Ayurveda, Yoga, Unani and Homeopathy. This sector not only boosts the travel, tourism and hospitality industry, but also provides new employment opportunities and makes a significant contribution to the development of infrastructure. The market for medical tourism in India is huge. Today, state-of-the-art medical facilities and advanced treatments are available in India at affordable rates compared to western countries, due to which India has become a major center of attraction for patients coming from other countries. I urge that insurance coverage and cashless medical services should be expanded for patients coming from other countries by partnering with international health insurance companies to promote medical tourism. To overcome the language related problems of patients coming from other countries, a system of strengthening customer care providing services in different languages should be developed, so that patients coming from other countries can get maximum facilities and India can be established as a major medical tourism destination.

(Several hon'ble Members associated.)

11. Demand for Comprehensive Development of Harishankar Temple in Gandhamardan Hills of Odisha

SHRI NIRANJAN BISHI: There are 43 UNESCO World Heritage Sites in our country. Apart from that, there is Gandhamardan Hills between Balangir district and Bargarh district in Odisha state. On top of that Hills, there is a temple of Lord Nrisinhnath in the south and a temple of Lord Harishankar in the north. There are also many holy ponds there. Apart from this, there are many places from the Dwapar era as well. Natural beauty is spread over 19 thousand hectares on this Gandhamardan Hills. It was declared a biodiversity heritage site. It has thousands of plant species, hundreds of varieties of animals and birds and snakes. A river flows from Gandhamardan Hills, which is called Ong river. Several waterfalls

are there. Historical Chinese traveler Hiuen Tsang has described Gandhamardan mountain by the name Parimalgiri.

(Dr. John Brittas associated.)

12. Need to Curb Use of Pesticides in Agriculture

DR. SIKANDER KUMAR: I would like to draw the attention of the Government to the additional cancer risk posed by the use of agricultural pesticides. Pesticides have transformed primary agriculture by increasing production yields and helping to reduce food insecurity amid rapid global population growth. However, from a public health perspective, exposure to pesticides is associated with many harmful effects. Those who come into direct contact with pesticides are most at risk. I would like to urge the Government to seriously consider moving away from chemical pesticide products in the future and prioritizing organic agricultural products, ban toxic pesticides and also make appropriate arrangements for strict regulation and control over their production, distribution and use. This will reduce the cost of farming, make farmers happier and make our environment cleaner.

(Several hon'ble Members associated.)

13. Demand for Censorship on Over The Top (OTT) Platforms

SHRI NARESH BANSAL: There should be censorship on OTT. It is necessary to protect social values. We are living in the era of on-the-go entertainment. With the rapid rise of OTT platforms, we can entertain ourselves with different types of shows and programs whenever and wherever we want. But these OTT platforms are uncontrolled. Before releasing films, they have to get a certificate from the censor board. There should be censorship on OTT platforms as well. It is necessary to regulate content to protect social and cultural values. Moral degradation is a matter of serious concern in Indian society, especially among the youth. Nowadays children are getting to see a variety of content through mobile phones, over which there is no control. It contains many objectionable words and dialogues, so children learn and start speaking them. Freedom is not being used properly, so there should be censorship. If OTT platforms cross the line, then legal action should be taken against them. OTT platforms now have more creative freedom than TV channels, as there are currently no rules for it. There is no control over what is shown. In such a situation, the Government should have a content regulatory framework for OTT and the Government should make efforts for this.

(Several hon'ble Members associated.)

14. Demand to Cover Jobless Workers of Textile Sector under Rajiv Gandhi Shramik Kalyan Yojana (RGSKY)

SHRI M. SHANMUGAM: I want to raise the issue to provide benefits under RGSKY to textile workers rendered jobless. The textile sector was next to agricultural sector in providing employment. Due to wrong textile policies, most of the mills were closed and to provide relief to jobless workers, Textile Workers Rehabilitation Fund Scheme was launched. This Fund has been merged with Rajiv Gandhi Shramik Kalyan Yojana to provide benefit to workers rendered jobless. During the last two decades, many NTC mills were permanently closed and thousands of workers and their families are on the streets, struggling to lead a dignified life. Many of the workers are in their old-age. But, unfortunately, jobless workers were not given the benefit of the above scheme on some technical ground as the notification of permanent closure of the mills was not issued. I request the Government to direct the ESIC to provide benefit of the scheme to all left-out jobless workers from the textile sector.

(Several hon'ble Members associated.)

15. Demand to Holistically Improve Connectivity of Assam in terms of Roads, Railways and Air

MS. SUSHMITA DEV: The regional development of any area depends on connectivity. We are heavily dependent on roadways. We have waited for two decades for Silchar-Saurashtra East West Corridor to complete. We have multiple challenges. Assam is a State where rainfall is very heavy. Our biggest challenge is soil and terrain. Landslides are beyond the control of human beings. Apart from that, peace in North East. Every time, one State is disturbed, the connectivity of other States is equally affected. Railway faces similar problems as roadways. Add to that the price of airfares. Till today, Mahasadak is incomplete. Our NH-6 is struggling. To go to our own capital, we have to go via Meghalaya. We have been demanding an alternative route to the Mahasadak which would save us from this dismal situation. I request you for urgent intervention to improve the connectivity there.

(Several hon'ble Members associated.)

16. Demand for Taking Immediate Action to Stop Delivery of Medicines Through Online Delivery Companies

DR. KANIMOZHI NVN SOMU: It is unfortunate and disturbing to see the supply of medicines by Swiggy and other door delivery companies. A 10-minute medicine delivery by a food delivery company sparks furore among the medical fraternity as well as pharma circle. The rapid delivery model violates the Indian drug regulations and poses health and safety risks to the public. The All India Organisation of Chemists and Druggists (AIOCD) has expressed serious concerns about potential collaboration between Swiggy's grocery arm Instamart and e-pharmacy giant PharmEasy, which aims to deliver medicines within 10 minutes. This is a dangerous model and this might bypass essential regulatory checks necessary for patient safety. Distribution and supply of medicines in India involves strict protocols to prevent harm to consumers. In this case, there is an apprehension that these safety measures could be compromised under the ultra-fast delivery timeline. AIOCD also questioned the reputational and legal risks associated with PharmEasy, which has faced regulatory scrutiny in the past. The ultra-fast delivery model may increase the possibility of expired or counterfeit medicines, which is harmful to patient safety. In such a model, it is not possible to follow the required quality standards. I urge the Government to take immediate action to stop the imminent danger of allowing the 10 minute delivery of medicines through Swiggy and other such online delivery companies and request the Government not to play with the life of the people.

(Several hon'ble Members associated.)

17. Demand for Providing Stoppage of Various Express Trains at Dildar Nagar, Zamania and Gahmar Railway Stations in Ghazipur District of Uttar Pradesh

DR. SANGEETA BALWANT: Thousands of people travel to different places daily from railway junction Dildarnagar, railway station Zamania and railway station Gahmar of Ghazipur district located in Danapur division. The railway revenue collection of these railway stations is also high. I request that stoppage of Himgiri Express, Jansadharan Express, Poorva Express, Pataliputra-Lokmanya Tilak Express, Ziarat Express, Patna-Lucknow-New Delhi Vande Bharat Express be provided at railway junction Dildarnagar. Along with this, I demand stoppage of Brahmaputra Mail, Patna-Indore Express, Jan Shatabadi Express and Sanghamitra Express at Zamania Railway Station.

SUO-MOTU STATEMENT BY MINISTER

Recent Developments in India's Relations with China

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI S. JAISHANKAR): I rise to apprise the House of some recent developments in the India-China border areas and their implications for our overall bilateral relations. The House is aware that our ties have been abnormal since 2020, when peace and tranquillity in the border areas were disturbed as a result of Chinese actions. Recent developments that reflect our continuous diplomatic engagement since then have set our ties in the direction of some improvement. The House is cognizant of the fact that China is in illegal occupation of 38,000 sq. km. of Indian territory in Aksai Chin as a result of the 1962 conflict and events that preceded it. Furthermore, Pakistan illegally ceded 5,180 sq. km. of Indian territory to China, which has been under its occupation since 1948. India and China have held talks for multiple decades to resolve the boundary issue. While there is a Line of Actual Control (LAC), it does not have a common understanding in some areas. We remain committed to engaging with China through bilateral discussions to arrive at a fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable framework for boundary settlement.

Hon'ble Members would recall that the amassing of a large number of troops by China along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Eastern Ladakh in April/May, 2020 resulted in face offs with our forces at a number of points. The situation also led to a disruption of patrolling activities. It is to the credit of our armed forces that despite logistical challenges and the then prevailing Covid situation, they were able to counter-deploy rapidly and effectively. The House is well-aware of the circumstances leading to the violent clashes in Galwan Valley in June, 2020. In the months thereafter, we were addressing a situation that had seen not only fatalities for the first time in 45 years, but also a turn of events serious enough for heavy weaponry to be deployed in close proximity to the LAC. While a determined counter-deployment of adequate capability was the Government's immediate response, there was also the imperative of a diplomatic effort to defuse these heightened tensions and to restore peace and tranquillity. The contemporary phase of our ties with China dates back to 1988, when there was a clear understanding that the Sino-Indian boundary question will be settled through peaceful and friendly consultations. In 1991, the two sides agreed to maintain peace and tranquillity in the areas along the LAC pending a final settlement of the boundary question. Thereafter, in 1993, an Agreement was reached on the maintenance of peace and tranquillity along the LAC. Subsequently in 1996, India and China agreed on confidence building measures in the military field. In 2003, we finalised a Declaration on Principles for our Relations and Comprehensive Cooperation, which included the appointment of Special Representatives. In 2005, a protocol was formulated on Modalities for Implementation of Confidence Building Measures in the Military Field along the LAC. At the same time, the Political Parameters and Guiding Principles for the settlement of boundary question was also agreed upon. In 2012, a Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination (WMCC) was established. A year later in 2013, we reached an understanding on border defense cooperation as well. The purpose of my recalling these agreements is to underline the elaborate nature of our shared efforts to ensure peace and tranquility in the border areas. And to emphasize the seriousness of what its unprecedented disruption in 2020 implied for our overall relationship. The situation arising after our counter-deployment called for a multiple set of responses. The immediate priority was to ensure disengagement from friction points so that there would be no further untoward incidents or clashes. This has been fully achieved, as I will explain. The next priority will be to consider

de-escalation, that would address the massing of troops along the LAC with associated accompaniments. It is also evident that the management of border areas will require further attention in the light of our recent experiences. In all of this, we were and we remain very clear that three key principles must be observed under all circumstances: (i) both sides should strictly respect and observe the LAC, (ii) neither side should attempt to unilaterally alter the status quo, and (iii) agreements and understandings reached in the past must be fully abided by in their entirety. Hon'ble. Members would also appreciate that as a result of the sustained tension and specific developments in the border areas, our overall relationship with China was bound to be impacted adversely. In the new circumstances, it was obviously not possible to continue the normal exchanges, interactions and activities as in the past. In this regard, we made clear that the development of our ties were contingent on the principles of mutual sensitivity, mutual respect and mutual interest. Throughout this period, Hon'ble Members would also be aware that the Government had publicly maintained that India-China relations cannot be normal in the absence of peace and tranquility in the border areas. The combination of a firm and principled stance on the situation as well as our clearly articulated approach to the totality of our ties has been the foundation of our engagement with China for the last four years. We have been very clear that the restoration of peace and tranquility in the border areas would be the basis for the rest of the relationship moving forward. Since 2020, our engagement was therefore focused on that objective. This took place at various levels involving different arms of the Government. I myself had many meetings with my Chinese counterpart, as indeed did my senior colleague, Raksha Mantriji. Our NSA had also engaged his Chinese counterpart, because both of them are special representatives on the boundary question. More detailed discussions were conducted by the Working Mechanism for Cooperation and Coordination, WMCC, at the diplomatic level. It also had a military counterpart. It was called the Senior Highest Military Commanders Meeting Mechanism (SHMC). The interactions were naturally very tightly coordinated with the combined presence of both the diplomatic and military officials in all the negotiations. Since June 2020, 17 meetings of the WMCC and 21 rounds of the SHMC have taken place. So, in that background, I would like to inform the House today about the agreement reached on 21st October 2024 regarding Depsang and Demchok. The twin considerations of an unstable local situation and an impacted bilateral relationship were clearly the drivers of the most recent endeavors. These two areas have been the focus of our discussions in WMCC and SHMC with the Chinese side since September 2022, when the last disengagement agreement was concluded at Hot Springs area. In the lead up to the October 21, 2024 agreement, I had discussed both the specific disengagement issue as well as the larger relationship with my counterpart, Foreign Minister, Wang Yi at Astana on 4th July and at Vientiane on 25th July. Our National Security Advisor and his Chinese counterpart also met in St. Petersburg on 12th September. The problem in these two areas pertained primarily to obstructions of our long-standing patrolling activity. In Demchok, there was also the question of access by our nomadic population to traditional grazing grounds, as well as to sites of significance to local people. As a result of this recent understanding arrived at after intensive negotiations, resumption of patrolling to the traditional areas is underway. It was initially tested by sending out patrols for verification of disengagement on ground and is being followed up by regular activities as per the agreed understanding. Following the October 21 understanding, our Prime Minister and Chinese President, Xi Jinping, had a meeting on the sidelines of the BRICS Summit in Kazan on October 23, 2024. They welcomed the understanding and directed the Foreign Ministers to meet and stabilize and rebuild bilateral relations. The Special representatives were also to oversee the management of peace and tranquillity in the border areas besides exploring a fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable solution to the boundary question.

In pursuance of that, I held discussions with Foreign Minister, Wang Yi, again on the sidelines of the G20 Summit in Rio de Janeiro on November 18, 2024. Raksha Mantriji also met the Chinese Defence Minister, Dong Jun, at the ASEAN Defence Ministers' (ADMM+) Meeting in Vientiane on November 20, 2024. The two Ministers discussed progress on the recent agreement on disengagement, the need to address de-escalation along the LAC, and the requirement to strengthen CBMs. They agreed on the importance of continued meetings and consultations at various levels. The House will remember that the October 21, 2024 Agreement is the latest in a series of understandings in regard to the resolution of the situation at various friction points in Eastern Ladakh. In the aftermath of the events of May-June, 2020 and the initial disengagement in Galwan Valley in July, 2020, there was a Foreign Ministers' meeting in Moscow on 10th September 2020. At that time, our Government's position was underlined that the immediate task was to ensure a comprehensive disengagement of troops in all the friction areas. It was also emphasized that the large concentration of troops along the LAC was not in accordance with the 1993 and 1996 Agreements, and that the Indian side would not countenance any attempts to change the status quo unilaterally. We also expected that all agreements and protocols, pertaining to the management of border areas would be scrupulously followed. Sir, the disengagement has now been achieved in full in Eastern Ladakh through a step-by-step process, culminating in Depsang and, then, Demchok. With the task of disengagement completed, it is now our expectation that discussions would commence in regard to the remaining issues that we had placed on the agenda. For the benefit of Hon'ble Members, I wish to flag for your attention the previous positions articulated in Parliament previously by the Government on this issue. On 15th September, 2020, Raksha Mantriji had made a detailed statement on Chinese attempts to transgress the LAC and the appropriate response given by our armed forces. On 11 February, 2021, Raksha Mantriji again briefed the House about the agreement on disengagement in the North and south banks of Pangong Lake. Thereafter, in August 2021, a third phase of disengagement took place in the area of Gogra, whereby troops would henceforth be in their respective bases. The next step took place in September, 2022, which pertained to the Hot Springs area. Again, forward deployments ceased in a phased, coordinated and verified manner, resulting in the return of troops to their respective areas. The most recent October 21, 2024 agreement comes in the wake of earlier disengagements. It completes the first phase that was agreed to in Moscow in September, 2020. As Members are aware, there is a long history of frictions, transgressions and face-offs in several sectors of the India-China border. This goes back to Barahoti from 1954, to Longju in 1959, to Sumdorong Chu from 1986 to 1995, and Depsang in 2013, amongst others. In the past, earlier Governments have agreed to a range of steps to diffuse situations that have arisen at different times, including offers from our side, to create demilitarized zones, limit non-patrolling zones, relocation or withdrawal of posts, disengagement of troops and dismantlement of structures. Different locations have seen different solutions being examined. Where the October 2021 understanding is concerned, our objective has been to ensure patrolling, as in the past, to the relevant patrolling points, as well as the resumption of grazing by our civilians, as per long-standing practice. This is indeed what we have agreed upon in regard to Depsang and Demchok. In a few other places where friction occurred in 2020, steps of a temporary and limited nature were worked out, based on local conditions to obviate the possibility of further friction. This, I must stress, applies to both sides and can be revisited as the situation demands. In that sense, our stance has been resolute and firm and serves our national security fully. The ensuring of our national security in this manner is the result of cumulative and coordinated endeavors of many parts of the Government, obviously centred

around defence and security forces. Indeed, the competence and professionalism of our services in this period was displayed in our speedy and effective counter-deployment. In the negotiations with China, the defence and diplomatic arms worked in lockstep to ensure that our national interests were comprehensively served. In that context, the House would also recognize that there has been a significant improvement in the border infrastructure, which has made such effective counter-deployment possible. This is reflected, amongst others, in the increase of border infrastructure allocations in the last decade. The Border Roads Organization alone has incurred three times the expenditure level of what it was a decade ago. Whether it is the length of the road network, or of bridges, or the number of tunnels, there has been a substantial increase over the earlier period. Notable milestones in this regard include the Atal Tunnel to Lahaul Spiti, the Sela and Nechiphu Tunnel to Tawang, the Umling La Pass Road in Southern Ladakh, and the extended opening of the Zojila access. Work is progressing on some strategically important roads and airfields in Ladakh. The adoption of new technologies in high-altitude, remote, inaccessible, and permafrost areas has also been significant. All of this, reflects the Government's firm commitment to protecting our borders and ensuring that the Armed Forces get the facilities and the logistical support that they deserve.

Finally, let me share with Hon'ble Members our expectations regarding the direction of ties with China in the near future. Our relationship has progressed in many domains, but was obviously negatively affected by recent events. We are clear that the maintenance of peace and tranquillity in border areas is a prerequisite for the development of our ties. In the coming days, we will be discussing both, de-escalation as well as effective management of our activities, in the border areas. The conclusion of the disengagement phase now allows us to consider other aspects of our bilateral engagement in a calibrated manner, keeping our national security interests first and foremost. In my recent meeting with Foreign Minister Wang Yi, we reached an understanding that the special representatives and the Foreign Secretary-level mechanisms will be convening soon. So, let me conclude by thanking Hon'ble Members for their attention. And, I am confident that the Government has the full support in addressing the complexities of this important relationship.

OBSERVATIONS BY THE CHAIR

MR. CHAIRMAN: Hon'ble Members, time and again, I have invited your attention, I have invited your indulgence that we are being watched by the entire nation. And, our demeanour is causing a serious dilution of the institution, an institution meant for debate is not having it; and, therefore, getting into irrelevance. The Rule on a statement is explicit. The hon'ble minister, in detail, has taken the House in confidence. He could be as exhaustive as could be possible. Even on such an issue, the kind of indecorous behaviour I saw, the kind of body language reflected; when I say it every time it does not earn me any accolades. But, I do it for whose sake? I do it only to restore, Hon'ble Members, your dignity. I want you to kindly contribute and believe in some kind of rules. We have created this House, on occasions when people are watching us, as something which should not have been. I have no doubt the Statement of the hon'ble Minister must have been seen by the entire country. They would be surely taking note of how comprehensive, how exhaustive and how understandingly he has conveyed a point of view. I would request the Members, please interact among yourselves outside the House, evolve some kind of a consensus, that there are issues of security, of national importance, where we need to exhibit exemplary conduct.

GOVERNMENT BILL

The Boilers Bill, 2024

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI PIYUSH GOYAL): I move that the Bill to provide for the regulation of boilers, safety of life and property of persons from the danger of explosions of stream-boilers and for uniformity in registration and inspection during manufacture, erection and use of boilers in the country and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto, be taken into consideration.

SHRI BRIJ LAL: The first Boiler Act was made in 1923, i.e., 101 years ago during the British rule. After that, many amendments were made in the year 2007. Boilers are used in many industries. It has many types. The old Act did not have proper arrangements for the design, manufacturing, maintenance etc. of boilers, so the present Government has resolved to change it. Many accidents have also happened due to boilers. It is also used in submarines and ships. In view of all this, it is necessary that safety standards are taken care of, manufacturing is done properly and monitoring is done from time to time Keeping all this in mind, I welcome the Bill that has been brought. During the British rule, the focus was on penalties, but the Modi Government decided that ease of doing business is very important. This Bill also provides for penalties, but most of the penalties are in the form of fines. It proposes an independent third-party inspection authority for inspection and certification purposes. This will ensure transparency. Decriminalization provisions have been included to benefit boiler users, including the MSME sector. It contains specific provisions to ensure the safety of people working inside the boiler. It defines a 'competent authority' who will see how boilers are being made, so that such a boiler is not manufactured that may likely cause a major incident. The Bill also provides for a Central Boiler Board which will monitor the design of boilers, the metal used, etc. It also aims to promote uniformity in the registration and inspection process of boilers. The Bill is very necessary for the country. I support it.

SHRI NEERAJ DANGI: The Boiler Bill, 2024 has been introduced to repeal the Boiler Act, 1923. It is stated in it that this will lead to ease of doing business and will benefit boiler users including MSMEs as the Bill contains provisions related to decriminalisation. The Boiler Act, 1923 was comprehensively amended in the year 2007 by the Indian Boilers (Amendment) Act, 2007. In such a situation, the need for another Bill definitely needs to be analysed. It is very difficult to understand the need for a special central law for boilers. Even though the Bill is a reform Bill in the eyes of the Government, I think the reality is something else. It is a hasty attempt to merely replace the old Act. Most of the provisions of the 1923 Act have been retained in the Bill. I do not understand the rationale for making a separate law in 2024 to regulate the design, manufacturing and operation of boilers, which are just an industrial equipment. Countries like Japan and Germany have also been regulating boilers under broad occupational safety and health laws. While safety concerns exist in various locations such as factories, manufacturing sites, mines, and construction sites, they are governed by specific laws. Parliament has passed the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020, which will replace these laws. Industrial safety and inspection have long been part of State laws and the Ministries of Labour and Heavy Industries. These departments have well-established processes and control mechanisms in place that can easily inspect industrial boilers. Creating an additional task force just for boilers and bringing a central law may be a waste of resources and personnel. The Bill also reflects the Government's stubbornness and its intention not to hand over old laws to the state Government. Is it fair to give blanket exemption or absolute power to any sector? Under The Boilers Act, 1923, State Governments may exempt certain sectors from the application of

certain provisions of the Act. The Boilers Bill, 2024 retains these provisions. The Bill also aims to ensure safety in boiler operations. It empowers State Governments to exempt boilers. The Government should have the power to exempt a sector only in exceptional cases. The quantum of penalty under Section 29 is also an important issue. Though it requires a jail sentence, the penalty of Rs 1,00,000 is a very small amount. We need a strict mechanism. Section 28 of the Bill calls for prosecution for violation of the law. This Bill centralises prosecution by requiring permission of the Chief Inspector under Section 33. The Bill lacks a mechanism for appeal. There is a bar on judicial recourse against the Government's decision, which is wrong. Safeguards against powers of entry for Inspectors are not specified. Although the said Bill specifies time limits for certain activities like registration, renewal of registration and appeal, no time limit has been specified for construction of boilers, completion of inspection for construction and approval of alteration and repair. The time limit for these will be specified through rules and regulations. I think that this Bill should be amended comprehensively to address these flaws and then it should be passed by incorporating them.

SHRIMATI MAUSAM B NOOR: I rise to speak on the Boilers Bill, 2024. Safety of those who are handling boilers is very important issue. The exemptions provided in the Bill need to be re-examined. The role of private players in such a crucial aspect as certification of boilers must be limited. I have a genuine question. While 'boilers' fall under the Concurrent List, why is it essential for the Union to introduce this Bill? The Bill replaces legislation enacted before Independence. However, it retains most of its provisions rendering it largely symbolic and lacking substantive impact. Its practical relevance is questionable. What is the need for a separate law on the design, manufacture and operations of boilers, which is just another industrial equipment? While the Bill empowers the State Governments to appoint Chief Inspector, Deputy Chief Inspector and Inspector, it also states that the qualification requirement will be told by the Union. Why, Don't you trust the States? Clause 43 of the Bill should be revisited. Be it a Chief Inspector or a Deputy Chief Inspector, an Inspector or even the Union Government, no one should be outside the scrutiny of the law. Thus, I request the Union Government to reconsider it.

[*]**SHRI ANTHIYUR P. SELVARASU:** I would like to speak against the Boilers Bill, 2024. This legislation focuses on safety and efficiency. At the same time, it undermines the federal principles and the autonomy of states. The objective of the Bill may be commendable. But it centralises the authority of the Union Government reducing the role of state governments. The regulation of boilers falls under the Concurrent List. The Bill gives the Union Government sweeping powers. If the states are empowered, they can excel in innovation. Centralised decision-making disregards this local expertise. Another concern is the financial burden this Bill could place on states. A centralised boiler regulation framework might work in some states but fail in others . States and industry stakeholders could have been consulted before drafting of this Bill. Policy decisions that impact millions of workers and industries across the country must be taken with transparency and inclusivity.

SHRI GOLLA BABURAO: The Boilers Bill, 2024 seeks to update and replace the Boilers Act of 1923 to improve the Boilers Safety Regulations, streamline procedures and align with the contemporary industrial practices. It contains several important definitions like 'competent authority', 'competent person' and 'boiler components', but lacks clarity on the specific criteria for recognising these authorities. While Clause 6 provides for grant of certificate for welders, it does not specify the detailed qualifications or the procedure for recognising the competent authorities which could lead to inconsistency across the States.

[*] Spoke in Tamil.

There may be disparities in its implementation across different States leading to regulatory inefficiency and confusion. Clauses 3,4,5 and 37 grant significant powers to the Central Government such as establishment of Central Boilers Board and the appointment of technical advisers. While this Bill seeks to modernize and streamline the regulatory framework for boiler safety, is a much-needed reform, several concerns must be addressed to ensure its effectiveness. These include potential ambiguities in the definition of authorities, centralization of powers, inadequate clarity on penalties and enforcement, and the possibility of over-burdening SMEs. Additionally, the Bill could benefit from more detailed industry-specific provisions and stronger emphasis on technological innovation in boiler safety. A more balanced approach to decentralization through guidelines and strengthened enforcement mechanisms will be critical to ensure that the Bill meets its objectives without unintended consequences. With this, YSR Congress Party supports the Bill.

DR. JOHN BRITTAS: When I say that this Bill does not have any substance, I have substantive points to offer. First of all, this is an old wine in a new bottle. Many of the clauses are more or less the repetition. Whatever tampering has been done with the Bill is to usurp the powers of the States. I will come specifically to Clause 23, sub-Clause 4. It mandates that the States must follow the Central Government's directions for investigating boiler accidents. Now, law and order is a State subject under our Constitution, so also a crime, naturally. Caluse 25 hands the Central Government the authority to hear second appeals on revisions against decisions made by the State Chief Inspector. Why should a boiler operating within a State have to appeal to Delhi for a resolution. Are the States, not capable of handling such a small issue? Or, this is yet another attempt to centralize everything in Delhi! Even the meager powers of the State are being usurped into by the so-called Bill.

SHRIMATI SULATA DEV: Where there is talk of 'Ease of Doing Business' and we are talking about industry, no one takes responsibility for the safety and security of the industrial workers who work in the industry. These industrialists are busy in their business and earning money, but if a poor daily wage labourer or industrial worker faces any problem, these people do not give him proper compensation and his family also does not get any compensation. I would request that there should be such a provision in the rules that at least their family gets good compensation, they get health insurance and life insurance, and they are given all the facilities for the education of their children. If this does not happen, there is no benefit from it.

SHRIMATI SEEMA DWIVEDI: I want to tell something about the benefits of this Bill. This is a step towards removing the shackles of the past. This Bill is a step to remove fear from the minds of small businessmen. There is improvement in safety standards, acceptance of latest technologies, simplification of rules, flexibility in enforcement, focus on pollution control, new education and training, monitoring of operations and maintenance, there is also provision for penalties and fines. There was often delay in compliance with the provisions of the old Act and many times industries had difficulty in understanding the rules and regulations and this often led to violation of rules. Now violations will not happen under the new Bill, because the compliance process has been made simple and transparent. Now companies will get clear information about the rules and procedures, and they will be directed to comply on time.

DR. DINESH SHARMA: It gives the power to establish Central Boilers Board. This will definitely give the power to form sub-committees and committees, which will simplify many things and make the decision-making process easier. Today, due to all the complexities, difficulties, and various types of technical problems, the decision-making ability is affected. Our Bill is not just about regulating the boiler fraternity, it is also about ensuring safety,

promoting efficiency and advancing sustainable development. This Bill demonstrates our commitment to protecting lives, boosting the economy and protecting the environment.

DR. M. THAMBIDURAI: The Government is considering for safety of property and persons from the dangers of explosion of boilers. The Bill also empowers the Central Government to constitute a Central Boilers Board to make regulations. It also empowers the State Governments to appoint Inspectors for inspecting and certifying boilers. This empowers Inspectors to enter the premises. However, it does not specify safeguards against such an action. Secondly, the Bill empowers the State Government to exempt an area from the application of the Bill. This raises a doubt whether safety would be ensured. Another concern is that the Bill disallows judicial discourse against the decision of the Central Government and Inspectors appointed by the State Government. Hence, the only option available here to the aggrieved industries will be to file a writ petition in the High Court. When we talk about appointing Inspectors, it reminds of us licensing raj and the corruption that takes place. Giving powers to the State Governments is one thing, but, at the same time, by giving powers to Inspectors, we have to see that corruption does not take place. I hope the hon'ble Minister will take care of these aspects and will clarify all these concerns in his reply.

SHRI P. P. SUNEER: The necessity of having a separate law for regulation of boilers is questionable as some countries like the United Kingdom and South Africa, regulation of boilers has been integrated into broader occupational health and safety laws. Clause 38 allows the State Governments to exempt certain areas from its application which raises concerns whether safety can be ensured in areas where such exemptions are granted. In pursuance to the Clause 43 under Section 25 and 26, aggrieved individual would not have judicial recourse against the decisions of the Government. The only option available to the public is to directly file a Writ Petition before the High Court under Article 226 of the Constitution. This might lead to misuse of power granted to these authorities and harassment of public.

SHRI DEEPAK PRAKASH: This Bill brought by the government is a laudable effort to amend the Boilers Act, 1923. This Act smacks of Englishness. The era is new, but the law is old; technology is new, but the law is old; entrepreneurship is new, but the law is old; vision is new, now people work with a new vision, but the law is old; therefore, the Prime Minister of the country, Narendra Modi has resolved to change thousands of obsolete laws and create a new India, self-reliant India, capable India, powerful India. In this series, today our honorable Minister has brought this new law. There were many problems and challenges in this Act of 1923, which are not conducive to face the current situation today. This law of 1923 is completely old and irrelevant. This is a law full of complexities and ambiguities. The lack of inspection and certification, which is clearly visible in the old law, has been done away with. There is system of punishment and penalty in old system. This system is not suitable for today's era and is also not necessary for today's economy. This Bill has been formulated to provide clarity and we can say that this is going to be a reflection of economic development. There is also a complete provision to take care of the environment in it. The aim of the government is to regulate the manufacture and use of boilers, ensure safety of life and property and to ban the use of unregistered and uncertified boilers.

SHRI NARESH BANSAL: Prime Minister has resolved to make India a developed nation by 2047. One of the five pranas announced by him is the call to come out of the mentality of slavery. In today's situation, India has become a manufacturing hub for rapid economic development and foreign companies are attracted, so there is a need for improvement in the boiler industry as well. Boilers are used in our sugar industry, fertilizer

industry, and other big and small industries. This is brought keeping India's domestic industry's progress in mind which should get facilities under ease of doing business. The workers working in the industry should be safe, life and property should be protected, new inventions should be encouraged. International level boilers should be made here too. They should be inspected from time to time, they should be registered. All these things have been kept in mind, so that MSME industries will continue to progress. The credibility that India is building in the world today, will increase further. This is a comprehensive Bill which will give a boost to the MSME industry, provide safety to workers at their workplace and protect their lives and property.

DR. FAUZIA KHAN: While the attempt of the Bill is to modernize it, how can we ignore environmental and sustainability concerns which have been severely overlooked in this Bill? Industrial steam boilers are energy intensive and one of the major sources of air pollution in the country. This Bill overlooks this concern completely. Provisions mandating or incentivizing renewable energy integration are notably absent and it lacks specific provisions for monitoring and controlling emissions. I urge that an environmental compliance expert be considered as a potential member of the Boilers Board being constituted under the Bill to ensure alignment of boiler regulations with environmental standards and sustainability practice. We have faced loss of human lives in innumerable explosion and leak accidents. The penalties proposed in the Bill starkly underplay the potential of catastrophic consequences to human life and property. I suggest that penalties be grossly extended. On the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Bhopal gas tragedy, we must have a legislation that gives due diligence to routine inspections and encourages adequate quality checks. Third party audits have been mentioned in the Bill and we have given them the authority to certify. What is the logic behind giving certification authority to private persons? The Boilers Bill, 2024 lacks provisions for an insurance-based inspection system. In our effort to improve, let our vision be much broader and when we modernize ourselves, let us not forget about the big calamity of environmental hazards over us.

SHRI SHAMBHU SHARAN PATEL: This Bill will replace the Boilers Act, 1923 and it will regulate boilers, boiler parts, and their manufacture, installation, use and repair. The Bill removes obsolete provisions to enhance ease of doing business and gives priority to the safety of workers. The Bill has been drafted as per modern drafting practices to provide more clarity to its provisions. To avoid any confusion, the Bill elaborates all the functions and powers of the Central Government, State Governments and the Central Boiler Board. The Bill will benefit boiler users including the MSME sector to facilitate ease of doing business. The Bill contains provisions related to decriminalization. To ensure safety of boilers and boiler workers, out of seven offences, criminal penalties have been retained for four major offences which may result in loss of life and property, whereas financial penalties are being introduced for other offences. In addition, monetary penalties for all non-criminal offences have been changed to fines, which will be imposed through the executive mechanism instead of the courts as before. In 2007, the UPA government made it even more confusing by making half-hearted amendments to the Indian Boilers (Amendment) Act, 2007. This effort reviews the existing Act, removes redundant and obsolete provisions and makes some enabling provisions for rules and regulations that did not exist earlier. Some new definitions have also been added and some existing definitions have been amended to give more clarity to the provisions of the Bill. The Act has been divided into six chapters and the provisions

have been rearranged chapter-wise. The Bill lays down rules and standards for the quality of boilers, which will improve the quality of boilers. It simplifies the rules for boilers, which will increase employment opportunities.

SHRI SAMIK BHATTACHARYA: The boilers are critical to industry like manufacturing, power and refineries, but they also pose significant risk if not properly inspected and maintained. This Bill is a positive effort to enhance the safety, efficiency and ease of doing business. Obsolete provisions in the Boilers Act, 1923 have been omitted. New definitions have been incorporated and some definitions have been amended in Boilers Bill, 2024. Power of the Central Government to make rules have been enumerated in detail in line with different provisions in the Bill. Redrafting of different clauses has been done as per current drafting practices and referencing of different provisions incorporated. It is a clear manifestation of *Aatmanirbhar Bharat*. It will enhance the efficacy, ease of doing business and safety measures to the workers engaged in this particular field. This legislation is not just about regulating boilers. It reflects our commitment to safeguarding lives, ensuring industrial efficiency and promoting substantial growth.

SHRI BABURAM NISHAD: I support the Boilers Bill, 2024. It deals with safety of life and property. Hence it is important to review the provisions of the existing Act and introduce a new Bill. The Act aims to enhance public safety and prevent industrial accidents. Boilers are critical equipment used across industries. From small boilers to large refineries, chemical, fertilizer and power plants, the Bill ensures quality during manufacturing, inspection and regular testing of boilers during use to prevent tragic incidents like boiler explosions. The Bill also ensures compliance with modern safety practices and international standards. This Bill streamlines the inspection and certification of boilers by simplifying the process. This certainly ensures transparency and reduces bureaucratic delays. This Bill ensures effective monitoring, empowering the State and Central authorities with clear guidelines to ensure that boilers are operated and maintained responsibly. This Boiler Bill promotes indigenous production of boilers and boiler components. Boilers manufactured in India are accepted worldwide due to their standard, quality, efficiency and safe operation. This Bill also aims to ensure safety, promote efficiency and pursue sustainable development. This Bill demonstrates our commitment to protect lives, boost the economy and protect the environment.

DR. AJEET MADHAVRAO GOPCHADE: Today's Bill is to reform the regulation of steam boilers in India. It aims to simplify the previous Act by removing unnecessary provisions. I congratulate the Hon'ble Prime Minister and our Commerce Minister for this. The symbols of slavery are being removed. This Bill will remove unnecessary fear from the minds of small businessmen. Our Government has worked to improve ease of doing business, reduce regulatory burden, promote industry growth, regulate rather than penalize businesses for minor violations and focus on improving safety. This Bill prioritizes the safety of workers working in the boiler industry. It provides for regular inspections. It provides for standardization of the process of registration of boilers. This Bill is a step towards reducing unnecessary burden on the judiciary on the lines of the Jan Vishwas Act. Under this proposed law, fines for non-criminal offences will be converted into penalties, which will be imposed through an executive mechanism, rather than judicial processes. This change not only reduces the burden on the courts but also ensures faster resolution of minor regulatory violations,

thereby increasing administrative efficiency. This Bill is an important step to ensure safety. For this, I humbly request the House to pass this Bill.

* * * * *
* * * * *

P. C. MODY,
Secretary-General.

rssynop@sansad.nic.in

****Supplement covering rest of the proceedings is being issued separately.