RAJYA SABHA

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*SYNOPSIS OF DEBATE

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(Proceedings other than Questions and Answers)

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Thursday, December 11, 2025/ Agrahayana 20, 1947 (Saka)

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REFERENCE BY THE CHAIR

Felicitations for Inscription of Deepavali on Unesco's Intangible Cultural Heritage List

MR. CHAIRMAN: Hon. Members, I am pleased to share a moment of immense pride for our nation. Our festival of lights, Deepavali, has been inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. This prestigious recognition, announced on the 10th of December, 2025, has sparked joy and celebration across our country and among Indians worldwide.

Deepavali is not merely a festival; it is a civilisational message. It symbolizes the triumph of light over darkness, knowledge over ignorance, hope over despair and *dharm* over *adharm*. Its universal philosophy cuts across faiths, regions, and generations, embodying the very spirit of India, i.e. inclusive, radiant, and resilient.

As you may be aware, Deepavali is the 16th element of Bharat to be inscribed on the UNESCO List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, thereby enriching it with the glow of India's civilizational legacy.

On my own behalf and on behalf of this august House, I extend heartiest felicitations to all Indians, to our cultural practitioners, and to every individual and institution that contributed to securing this global recognition.

May this achievement inspire us to preserve, promote, and proudly celebrate our rich heritage and traditions with renewed commitment and reverence.

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MATTERS RAISED WITH THE PERMISSION OF THE CHAIR

1. Concern over SCCL's Production Decline, Pending Mine Clearances and Financial Stress

SHRI RAVI CHANDRA VADDIRAJU: Singareni Collieries Company Limited (SCCL) is not only crucial for the country's coal production but also the lifeline for millions of families in Telangana's coal belt. Heavy rains and floods in recent months have led to a sharp decline in coal production and dispatch, impacting power supply commitments and the target of 72 million tonnes for 2025-26. Meanwhile, crucial expansion projects such as Kothagudem VK Open-Cast, JK OCP, and Gundala in Yellandu are stalled awaiting various clearances, affecting both SCCL's growth and coal availability in the southern region. With the company's expansion, safety, efficiency, and environmental protection must be given top priority. Workers are demanding better monitoring systems, modern equipment, and faster clearances to ensure safe and sustainable mining. SCCL is rapidly diversifying into new areas such as rare earth elements, critical minerals, battery storage, pumped hydro, wind, and geothermal energy, for which it requires support from the central government. Workers are also concerned about a potential public issue in 2026. Therefore, I request immediate support for SCCL's production, workforce, financial stability, and diversification plans.

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

(Several hon'ble Members associated.)

2. Need for Development of Tribal and Nature based Tourism in Koraput, Mayurbhanj, and Simlipal regions in Odisha

***SHRIMATI MAMATA MOHANTA:** The initiative to connect Eastern India and its tribal regions to mainstream tourism is highly commendable. The unique features of our region—its rich tribal culture, natural beauty, coffee plantations, folklore, eco-trails, wellness tourism, and the Similipal Tiger Reserve—offer immense tourism potential. Nature-based experiences, safaris, community-based homestays, local handicrafts, and wellness programs can provide a sustainable livelihood for our youth and women. Therefore, I urge that special plans be developed for Koraput, Mayurbhanj, and Similipal, that training in skill development, eco-trail management, homestay operations, and handicraft marketing be expanded, and that the entire region be developed as a wellness and eco-tourism hub. A long-term plan to integrate tribal art, cuisine, dance, and culture into tourism is also essential. Finally, I humbly request the government to secure the elephant corridors in Mayurbhanj and Similipal to effectively control human-wildlife conflict and forest fires. The participation of local communities and strong administrative support are crucial for their conservation.

(Several hon'ble Members associated.)

3. Demand for Regulatory Safeguards to Prevent Overcharging by Private Hospitals

DR. K. LAXMAN: I want to draw the attention of this House towards the alarming rise in exploitive practices by certain private corporate hospitals. Reports from patients, the civil society and consumer bodies pointed out disturbing pattern, unnecessary diagnostic tests, unwanted prolonged hospital stays with no clinical justifications, opaque billing practices that inflate treatment costs far beyond reasonable limits. During emergencies, the arbitrary practices of private corporate hospitals disproportionately affect ordinary citizens. In the absence of transparent pricing and effective regulation, patients are forced to accept whatever charges are levied, pushing many families into debt and hardship. Recently, a consumer commission in Hyderabad ordered a private hospital to pay ₹3 lakh in compensation for overcharging during the COVID-19 pandemic—such cases are occurring across the country. Many hospitals are now charging outpatient fees ranging from ₹1,500 to ₹3,000, which are not covered under government schemes. I urge the Government to ensure transparency in medical billing, standardization of procedures, and robust regulatory safeguards, as there is often a discrepancy between the charges displayed by hospitals and the charges actually collected. For the goal of a developed India, our society and nation must remain healthy.

(Several hon'ble Members associated.)

4. Concern over Plight of Migrant Labour in Urban Areas

SHRIMATI SAGARIKA GHOSH: I want to draw the attention of the House to the plight of migrant workers, who are considered the backbone of our cities. These are the very people who build our urban infrastructure and yet suffer the most. Recently, several migrant workers were among those who died in a fire at a nightclub in Goa. During the 2020 COVID lockdown, they were the ones most affected, given only four hours' notice, forcing many to walk thousands of kilometers to return home. The 2011 census reveals that one in three urban residents is a migrant worker, and most live in extremely poor conditions in slums. Bengali-speaking migrant workers in Delhi and Gurugram are frequently harassed by the police, wrongly accused of being "Bangladeshis," even though they are citizens of this country with all the necessary documents. Many women have been subjected to abuse. The court has also questioned the police investigation. According to a Ministry of Home Affairs memorandum, deportation can only be carried out in emergency situations and after proper investigation.

(Several hon'ble Members associated.)

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* Spoke in Odia

5. Demand for High-Level Inquiry into Alleged Brutal Lathi-Charge on Peaceful and Unarmed Tribal Villagers in Chaibasa, Jharkhand

SHRI ADITYA PRASAD: I wish to draw the attention of this House to the extremely tragic incident that occurred on October 27, 2025, in Chaibasa, Jharkhand. Overloaded vehicles regularly ply the Chaibasa-Singhpokharia-Tata bypass, and hundreds of lives have been lost in the last two years. Tribal villagers were going to meet the Transport Minister to present their grievances, but the administration failed to engage with them throughout the day. As evening approached, the police unleashed brutality on the unarmed tribals, resorting to lathi charges, water cannons, and tear gas. The Congress-backed state government has no right to perpetrate such injustice against the tribal community. In this incident, 75 people were named in an FIR, another 500 unknown individuals were also included in the FIR, and several people were imprisoned. It is also regrettable that when a former Chief Minister attempted to discuss these issues with the Deputy Commissioner, the DC behaved rudely towards him, despite the former Chief Minister holding the rank of a cabinet minister. A high-level inquiry should be conducted into the actions of the guilty police and administrative officers, and appropriate action should be taken to prevent such incidents from recurring.

(Several hon'ble Members associated.)

6. Demand to Regulate Credit Scoring Companies and Agencies.

DR. KANIMOZHI NVN SOMU: Credit scoring agencies wield unchecked power and have almost complete control over loan approvals. Today, a three-digit CIBIL score determines the credit access of millions of people, including young entrepreneurs, students, and farmers. Banks and NBFCs blindly rely on this score without any human evaluation. Most concerning is the lack of robust government oversight over these private agencies' data collection, score calculation, and error correction processes. Even a minor reporting error can ruin a citizen's financial future, while there is no time-bound grievance redressal mechanism, and the entire burden is always placed on the borrower. Furthermore, several private companies are charging exorbitant fees in the name of "improving" credit scores and exploiting vulnerable individuals without any clear regulations. People are even paying to correct errors that shouldn't have occurred in the first place. Financial inclusion is not possible with opaque algorithms and unregulated profiteering. The purpose of credit should be to empower people, not merely to generate profits. The financial dignity of our citizens cannot be left to the mercy of unregulated private entities. I urge the establishment of a statutory regulatory body for credit bureaus.

(Several hon'ble Members associated.)

7. Need for strengthening Detailed Project Report (DPR) Quality and On-site Oversight in National Highway Projects of Himachal Pradesh

SHRI HARSH MAHAJAN: Our Himalayas are extremely fragile. This year's heavy monsoon led to continuous landslides, road collapses, and prolonged closures. Road construction in the mountains requires specialized expertise, but unscientific practices have destabilized the slopes and caused permanent damage. Mr. Gadkari has also pointed out that there are often deficiencies in the Detailed Project Reports (DPRs). The agencies preparing the DPRs should be rigorously scrutinized, and every DPR must be based on thorough geotechnical and environmental studies. Furthermore, on-site monitoring by trained NHAI officials is crucial to ensure that contractors adhere to the approved plans. Many contractors fail to meet targets, compromise on quality, engage in unscientific cutting, and dump debris into rivers—such violations must be dealt with strictly. I am confident that with these reforms and the support of the central government, we will be able to build robust, sustainable, and environmentally sensitive roads that will enhance connectivity for our people while protecting the fragile ecology of the Himalayas.

(Several hon'ble Members associated.)

8. Need for Upgradation and Enhanced Connectivity of Bari Sadri-Udaipur Railway Line

SHRI CHUNNILAL GARASIYA: I would like to draw the government's attention to the need for improvement and new connectivity on the Bari Sadri-Udaipur railway line. I come from Udaipur, the land of Mewar, where thousands of tourists visit every year, including areas like Chittorgarh, Udaipur, Nathdwara, Ranakpur, and Banswara. In recent years, the number of passengers on the Bari Sadri-Mavli-Udaipur railway line has increased rapidly, providing people with affordable and convenient transportation. This line is planned to be extended to Neemuch (Madhya Pradesh), but due to the power change at Mavli and the current route configuration, trains are experiencing significant delays. To address this problem, I urge that a survey be conducted and a new broad-gauge line be constructed connecting the existing broad-gauge line from Bari Sadri to Mavli, passing through the Bhatewar-Kheroda overbridge, and continuing via Daroli and Dabag to Debari station. This will reduce travel time and greatly benefit passengers.

I request the Government of India that, in the future, a new broad-gauge railway line be surveyed and laid from the Bhatevar–Kheroda overbridge to Daroli, Dabag, and up to Debari station, along the broad-gauge line coming from Badi Sadri to Mavli. This will provide even greater convenience and benefit to passengers.

(Several hon'ble Members associated.)

9. Demand for instituting a National Social Innovation Awards Programme to Recognise and Promote Community-Centred Innovations

SHRIMATI SUDHA MURTY: Innovations have helped a lot to the humankind. It has made our life easy and changed the entire world. Do we ever remember the person who innovated We do not remember social innovators at all. the person who found out QR code in Japan did not patent his innovation. He said, "No, it should be made free." With QR code, the entire global economy is booming very well. You have technology-orientated awards from the Department of Commerce and Industries. When it comes to social innovation, there is no award line. So, I request the Government of India to start a new award line, social innovation award line, so that social innovators can be recognized and respected.

10 Concern over Growing Menace of Counterfeit Medicines and Need for Pre-market Quality Checks

SHRIMATI JEBI MATHER HISHAM: I rise today to bring to the attention of this august House, a very grave and alarming threat to public health in Kerala. Recent raids conducted in Kozhikode, Thrissur and Thiruvananthapuram have revealed a shocking truth. Spurious, substandard poor quality medicines have flooded the pharma market. This is not a small lapse. These raids exposed the utter failure and shameful inefficiency of the State Drugs Control Department. The problem is not limited to Kerala. This is an alarming surge of counterfeit medicines nationwide.

(Several hon'ble Members associated.)

11. Concern over Agrarian Distress in Several Regions

DR. FAUZIA KHAN: Maharashtra ranks first in the country in the number of farmer suicides. In the State Legislative Assembly, the Government stated that in just the last three months, 767 farmers have committed suicide. Of these, 676 farmers received government assistance, while 200 did not, because they did not meet the eligibility criteria. Caught in this game of numbers, the poor farmer is bewildered. According to the assessment of the State Agriculture Minister, Dattatreya Bharne, 14.36 lakh hectares across 191 talukas in 29 districts have been affected. However, in the report that the State Government has sent to the Centre, the affected area has been stated as only 1,10,309 hectares. — Where is 14 lakh, and where is just one lakh! This is not a routine seasonal setback; rather, it is a massive agricultural loss that has impacted millions of farmers. Under the existing crop insurance criteria, the current figures fall far short. All farmers should receive assistance.

(Several hon'ble Members associated.)

12. Need for Comprehensive Development of Pilgrimage Tourism, Environment and Infrastructure in Braj Region

SHRI TEJVEER SINGH: Under the leadership of the Hon'ble Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, the development of the Braj region has received a new direction in recent years. Even so, there are some immediate challenges in the Braj region that require urgent attention. The pollution of the Yamuna in the Mathura-Vrindavan area is a matter of serious concern for pilgrims and local residents. It is necessary to increase the capacity of sewage treatment plants (STPs), strictly monitor pollution sources, and promote biodiversity conservation along the riverbanks. During Navratri, Janmashtami, and the Barsana festival, the number of devotees increases manifold. For this, smart traffic management, e-shuttle bus services, and multi-level parking are extremely necessary. Special packages should be provided to train local youth in tourism services such as tour guiding, hospitality, handicrafts, and cultural programs to enhance employment opportunities. Serious consideration should be given to starting metro rail services from Mathura to Vrindavan, Vrindavan to Barsana, and Barsana to Giriraj Govardhan. A special comprehensive development plan should also be introduced for the Braj region.

(Several hon'ble Members associated.)

13. Concern over Severe Increase in Pollution Levels in Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh

SHRI GOLLA BABURAO: I am deeply perplexed as to where should I start from. Should I start from being happy that Visakhapatnam is rapidly progressing as economic hub of Andhra Pradesh or should I start from showing concern that Visakhapatnam has featured for six days in the list of top 10 most polluted cities in India. The pollution levels in Visakhapatnam are ten times higher than the WHO's recommended limit! Industrial pollution is the primary cause, followed by vehicular emissions, road dust, construction activities, biomass burning, etc. As per the Central Pollution Control Board, Visakhapatnam has been identified as a non-attainment city for failing to meet the national ambient air quality standards. I appeal to the hon. Prime Minister and the hon. Environment Minister to personally intervene and direct the States, first to fill all the vacancies in the AP Pollution Control Board; secondly, take advantage of the Union Government's National Clean Air Programme initiative; thirdly, strict monitoring of air quality in Visakhapatnam be done and, finally, let the Central Pollution Control Board monitor what Andhra Pradesh Pollution Control Board is doing to mitigate the situation.

14. Demand to Shift Winter and Budget Sessions out of Delhi Due to Severe Air Pollution

SHRI MANAS RANJAN MANGARAJ: Every winter, Delhi does not face pollution; it faces a public health disaster. For weeks, Air Quality Index remains above 400 and 500. this is not bad air; this is toxic air. In Delhi, a manmade disaster returns every year. Our Members, our officers, drivers, sanitation workers and security personnel breathe this poisonous air every day just to keep this House functioning. We cannot ignore their suffering. I place one clear appeal before the Government: Shift the Winter Session and the Budget Session out of Delhi until the air becomes safe. I urge the Government to act with urgency and begin structured consultation without delay.

(Several hon'ble Members associated.)

15. Demand for Immediate Repair and Upgradation of Goa-Belagavi National Highway, including Anmod and Chorla Ghat Sections

SHRI SADANAND MHALU SHET TANAVADE: I rise to draw the urgent attention of this August House to the difficult condition of the Goa-Belagavi National Highway, one stretch passing through Anmod Ghat and the other through Chorla Ghat. These highways are vital lifelines for both Goa and Karnataka, In the recent monsoon, parts of Anmod Ghat collapsed due to heavy rains, cutting off connectivity for hours and sometimes even days. Goa has strong links with Belagavi

for medical, educational, commercial and family needs. People travel regularly for treatment, studies, shopping and business. Nearly 80 per cent of the vegetables and fruits consumed in Goa reach the State through these highways. With the new year approaching, it is important to keep these roads in proper condition. Any disruption will affect the supply of essential goods and cause hardship to thousands of families and traders in Goa. I request the Government to urgently take up repair and strengthening works of these highways, especially the Ghat sections. Proper monitoring, warning systems and rescue arrangements should be put in place to avoid long blockages during landslides or accidents. I sincerely urge the Government to speed up the ongoing works and ensure that this lifeline remains safe, motorable and reliable at all times.

(Several hon'ble Members associated.)

16. **Demand for Recognition of Kurmali and Rajbanshi-Kamtapuri Languages in Eighth Schedule to the Constitution**

♦**SHRI SAMIRUL ISLAM:** In the Jungle Mahal districts, specifically Purulia, Jhargram, Bankura, and Paschim Medinipur, the majority of people from the Kurmi community speak in the Kurmali language. Apart from West Bengal, people of the Kurmi community reside in Assam, Jharkhand, and Odisha. In the North Bengal districts of West Bengal, specifically Cooch Behar, Alipurduar, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, Dinajpur, and Malda, people of the Rajbanshi community reside. The majority of the Rajbanshi community speak in the Rajbanshi and Kamtapuri languages. Apart from West Bengal, people of the Rajbanshi community are present in Assam, Meghalaya, and Bihar. Through you, I demand of the Central Government that the Rajbanshi and Kamtapuri languages be included in the Eighth Schedule.

The indigenous (Adivasi) people of our country are worshippers of nature; they worship nature. Their primary religions are Sari Dharma and Sarna Dharma. In West Bengal, various communities such as Santhal, Bhumij, Munda, Kora, Lodha, Oraon, Sabar, Birhor, Mech, Rava, Kariya, Mahali, Chik Baraik, etc., follow the Sari and Sarna religions. I demand of the Central Government: The tribal communities who have been living in this Bharat Varsha (India) for lakhs of years, their religions, Sari Dharma and Sarna Dharma, should be given recognition immediately.

(Several hon'ble Members associated.)

17. **Need for Interim Repairs and Safety Improvements on Kadapa-Renigunta Section of NH-716 until Completion of New Greenfield Highway Project**

SHRI MEDA RAGHUNADHA REDDY: The Kadapa-Renigunta section of NH-716, which continues to serve as primary corridor for people of Rayalaseema has deteriorated severely even as work on the new Greenfield four-laning project has begun. The existing highway, burdened with heavy traffic and diversions, has become unsafe, accident-prone and extremely difficult to travel causing immense hardship to commuters, patients, students, and transport operators. Until the new Greenfield alignment is completed, the public has no alternative route. Therefore, urgent interim measures are required. I request the hon. Minister of Road Transport and Highways to issue necessary directions to the implementing agencies and ensure a clear timeline for these interim improvements so that the people of Rayalseema do not continue to suffer during the construction period of the new highway.

18. Concern over Rising Piracy Threat to Indian Film Industry

SHRI JAGGESH: My concern is over rising piracy threat to the Indian film industry. Today, piracy has become one of the biggest threats to both Indian and the global film industry. With the rapid expansion of digital platforms, high speed internet and advanced technology, unauthorized copies of the films are being sent online within hours of their release. I urge the Central Government to strengthen the digital information mechanism, adopt advanced cyber surveillance tools and impose stricter punitive measures on those involved in piracy to protect the future of the Indian cinema. Coordinated action between the Government agencies, the film industry and the cyber security experts

♦ Spoke in Bengali.

is essential to safeguard our creative ecosystem and protect the nation's cultural heritage and our cinema also.

19. Demand for Ban on Illegally Running Night Clubs and Hookah Bars

SHRIMATI PHULO DEVI NETAM: My subject concerns shutting down illegally operating nightclubs and hookah bars. A devastating fire broke out in a nightclub in Goa, resulting in the tragic death of 25 people, including four foreign nationals. This incident is extremely sorrowful.

DISCUSSION ON 150TH ANNIVERSARY OF NATIONAL SONG 'VANDE MATARAM'- *(Contd.)*

THE LEADER OF THE HOUSE (SHRI JAGAT PRAKASH NADDA): This is a historic moment for all of us, and we are witnessing it together. The young generation of today, which has not seen the freedom struggle, will be able to understand that history more deeply through this discussion and draw inspiration from it in the times to come. Vande Mataram is considered a mantra that awakens the soul of the nation—it is a call for national reconstruction, connecting us to our culture and filling us with pride. This song has been a witness to many historic events and was also a source of energy during the freedom movement. For me, Vande Mataram is a mantra, a resolve, and a form of devotion to Mother India. The emotions it evokes are difficult to express in words. This song ignites the spirit of freedom and connects us with the sacrifices and inspirations of the freedom struggle. In 1875, when the British administration tried to impose "God Save the Queen" on us, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay gave the nation Vande Mataram. This song awakened a sense of pride and consciousness among Indians. In 1882, it was included in Anandamath and became a motivating mantra for the freedom struggle. The British were so afraid of this song that they banned it, and anyone singing or chanting it could be sent to jail. Vande Mataram inspired the spirit of freedom and patriotism not only in North or East India but throughout the entire country. The voice and resonance of Vande Mataram were not limited to North India; they reached as far as Tamil Nadu in the South. I recall that during the movements in Tuticorin and Tirunelveli, this song united the people and inspired the revolutionaries of that time. I also remember that at the time of Khudiram Bose's execution, his last words were Vande Mataram. This song is a mantra that awakens emotions and advances the nation with unity. When discussing historical events, one must have the courage to take responsibility. At that time, the rulers and leaders of the country—such as Jawaharlal Nehru—did not fully uphold their responsibility toward this song and the freedom movement. Vande Mataram did not receive the honor and status it deserved during that period, and the then-rulers were responsible for this. In September 1937, Jawaharlal Nehru, in a letter to Urdu writer Ali Sardar Jafri, criticized Vande Mataram for its "too many difficult words" and argued that its ideas did not align with modern notions of nationalism and progress. At that time, the Prime Minister essentially rejected the cultural and historical significance of the song for India. Under his leadership, due to pressure from communal elements, the sacred song was altered, and only the first two stanzas—invoking Bharat Mata without the depiction of Maa Durga wielding weapons—were officially promoted. Gradually, these first two stanzas gained national significance, while the rest of the song became little known and rarely sung. Even though there was nothing inherently objectionable in the other stanzas, the Committee at that time accepted the concerns raised by some Muslim friends and recommended that only the first two stanzas be sung at national gatherings. The song was never sung as a challenge to any community or group. The Committee recommended 'Wherever Vande Matram is sung at national gatherings, only the first two stanzas should be sung with perfect freedom to the organizers to sing any other song of an unobjectionable character in addition to it or in place of Vande Mataram song. The decision to declare "Jana Gana Mana" as the National Anthem was announced on the final day of the Constituent Assembly, January 24th, 1950, without any debate and discussion on prior notice simply through the statement of Dr. Rajendra Prasad. On 24 January 1950, the final meeting of the Constituent Assembly took place at 11:00 AM, during which three copies of the Constitution were signed. Without any debate, discussion, or prior notice, a statement was read declaring Jana Gana Mana as the National Anthem of India, while also stating that Vande Mataram would be accorded equal respect. I feel that how this decision aligned with constitutional procedure or democratic norms should be left for the

members of the Constituent Assembly to judge. I believe that Jawaharlal Nehru was entirely responsible for the indifference shown toward Vande Mataram during this process. From his written reply, I also learned that in a letter dated 25 August 1948 to Sardar Patel, Nehru clarified that he was personally making all decisions regarding the National Anthem, and that Jana Gana Mana had been presented to the United Nations in 1947. On what authority Nehru declared Jana Gana Mana as India's National Anthem internationally, when at that time he had neither been elected as the Prime Minister nor had the Constituent Assembly formally decided on the National Anthem. Where did Nehru learn this "best constitutional practice" of first getting a national anthem approved abroad and then asking the country to accept it? During the three-year tenure of the Constituent Assembly, which had 167 working days, only nine minutes were formally dedicated to the issue of the national anthem. I recall that on 15 November 1948, Shri Shibban Lal Saxena formally proposed an amendment to include Vande Mataram as the national anthem in the Second Schedule of the Constitution, but it was rejected. Was it really necessary to form a separate committee for the national anthem, like the one formed for the national flag? On 21 June 1948, in a letter to Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, Nehru clearly stated that he did not consider Vande Mataram suitable to be the national anthem.

In 1971, we passed the Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971, which provides for punishment for the disrespect of the National Flag, the National Anthem, and the Constitution. But even at that time, once again, the National Song Vande Mataram was not included in it. Sir, it is a great irony that under this Act, if someone disrespects Vande Mataram or does not sing it, there is no punishment prescribed for that. I have been speaking about *Vande Mataram* from the very beginning, and the core issue is not elsewhere—it lies in your approach. From the very start, you have compromised on everything. 'Maa Bharati' is not an ordinary expression; it is a sentiment born from thousands of years of our civilization and culture. But you have repeatedly compromised with this very sentiment. And I also want to say that whenever the Congress comes to power anywhere, this tendency becomes visible again. Interrupting discussions has become their habit. I want to remind the House that these symptoms I am citing are not new—they are a hundred years old. This is a century-old thought process of constant compromises. From accepting the 1913 Waqf Act that gave special property rights only to Muslims, to allowing the 1936 partition of the Bombay Presidency against the wishes of Sindhi, Marathi, Marwari, Gujarati, Parsi and Goan Christian communities—Congress accepted everything. In 1937, when the Muslim League opposed *Vande Mataram*, Congress accepted that too and reduced it to two stanzas. Then in 1947, while Jinnah pushed the two-nation theory, Congress once again compromised and delivered a partitioned freedom. Even in Jammu & Kashmir, despite Maharaja Hari Singh signing the Instrument of Accession, Congress surrendered to Pakistan's aggression, accepted a divided Kashmir, and further compromised by inserting Article 370 into the Constitution. This is the nature of the freedom they gave us. This is not a fight over land, nor a fight over anything else; it is a battle of ideas. When I say it is a battle of ideas and that *Vande Mataram* has not received the respect and place it deserves, and when I say that I am fully prepared to honour *Jana Gana Mana* throughout my life, even to live and die for it, I must also say one thing: a nation does not run on compromises. The song *Vande Mataram* is deeply connected with our nationalism. I also want to say that *Vande Mataram* should be given the same status that we give to our national flag and national anthem. It should be included in the Constitution.

Discussion concluded.

OBSERVATIONS BY THE CHAIR

MR. CHAIRMAN: Hon. Members, before we proceed with the discussion on 'Election Reforms', I wish to invite the attention of the House to certain procedural aspects. First, the Election Commission of India is an autonomous, constitutional authority under Article 324 of the Constitution of India. Consequently, its day-to-day functioning is not primarily the concern of the Government of India. Secondly, I wish to refer to Rule 238 (v) of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in the Council of States, which states that –

"A member while speaking shall not reflect upon the conduct of persons in high authority unless the discussion is based on a substantive motion drawn in proper terms."

Finally, I would like to remind you that the matters concerning Special Intensive Revision of Electoral Rolls in various States are presently sub judice and under adjudication by the Supreme Court of India. In this context, your attention is invited to Rule 238 (i) of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in the Council of States, which states that -

"A member while speaking shall not refer to any matter of fact on which a judicial decision is pending."

Accordingly, I request all hon. Members to keep these provisions in consideration while making their valuable interventions and desist from making any submissions which contravenes the same. Anything said by Members in contravention to the prescribed limitations shall not be made part of record.

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DISCUSSION ON ELECTION REFORMS

SHRI AJAY MAKAN: We proudly say that India is the mother of democracy, but the facts I am placing before this House prove that this very mother is now gasping for life. Any vibrant democracy rests on three fundamental conditions—equal opportunity, transparency, and credibility—and today all three are under serious threat. I am speaking solely on the basis of data. As the Treasurer of the Congress Party, I examine our accounts and those of other parties after every election. In 2004, the BJP had ₹88 crore and the Congress had ₹38 crore—there was only a modest difference. In 2009, the Congress was ahead, with a 60:40 ratio. This situation continued until 2014. But in the next five years, everything changed. In 2014, the BJP had ₹295 crore, and by 2019 this jumped to ₹3,562 crore. The Congress, by contrast, was left with only ₹315 crore. And the figures for 2024 are even more startling.Today the situation has become so imbalanced that the BJP's accounts have reached ₹10,107 crore, while the Congress has only ₹133 crore. Even before the elections were announced, all our bank accounts were frozen, ₹135 crore was forcibly withdrawn, and the accounts were reopened only after the elections had begun—how can the Opposition contest an election under such conditions? Industrialists also say that it has become impossible to donate to the Congress because the moment they do, ED and IT pressure follows. This is a direct assault on democracy.The situation regarding transparency is equally serious. In Haryana, the voting percentage increased from 61% to 68% by the time of counting. The High Court ordered the release of CCTV footage, but the Government changed the rules to permanently prevent its release. If everything was proper, then why the need to hide it? Earlier, CCTV footage used to be preserved for one year, but this period was reduced to 45 days, and then we are told to file an election petition within those 45 days. The reality, however, is that most election petitions get stuck for years due to technical objections. The credibility of the Election Commission is absolutely crucial. The Supreme Court, in March 2023, ordered that Election Commissioners should be appointed by an impartial committee, but the Government changed the law, removed the Chief Justice from the panel, and added one of its own Ministers. On top of that, Election Commissioners have been given total immunity—no matter how biased their actions may be, no action can be taken against them. If no wrongdoing has occurred, then why the need to hide and defend? Questions such as the suicide of more than 44 BLOs, the disregard of the Supreme Court's orders regarding Aadhaar, and the shifting of the burden of proof onto citizens—these shake the very foundations of our democracy. We are asking these questions within the rules, and these questions must be asked.

I wish to highlight the double standards in enforcing the Model Code of Conduct. Welfare schemes run by our governments in Telangana and Himachal were stopped, yet during the Bihar elections the NDA transferred ten thousand rupees to lakhs of women. I question the Election Commission's transparency—refusing machine-readable rolls, hiding IP addresses, and erasing evidence within 45 days. The EC has become a puppet of the government, which can now appoint its own Commissioners. If institutions of democracy lose credibility, Parliament will remain only a structure. Rules and umpires may be changed, but the people's voice cannot be silenced forever.

DR. SUDHANSHU TRIVEDI: I view electoral reforms in four layers—democratic foundations, electoral processes, reforms, and opposition objections. India is the only stable democracy in the eastern hemisphere, and citations from Freedom House and Dr. Ambedkar show that our democratic roots lie in Indian culture. Post-Independence elections had challenges; the first election petition was filed by Ambedkar himself. Nehru's recorded reaction to Ambedkar's defeat is a reminder from history. I wish to show how reforms evolved gradually—from EVMs to voter IDs and CCTV monitoring. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar said that for principles of equality, liberty, and fraternity, there is no need to look to the West; these principles can be found in the Upanishads. Yet even today, some leaders go to London pleading to save democracy in India. After independence, the electoral process began, and there were many challenges. During Indira Gandhi's tenure, for the first time, a Prime Minister's election was declared invalid due to irregularities. After that, election reforms were addressed. In 1977, ECIL was asked to explore electronic voting, in 1982 EVMs were trialed at 50 polling booths, in 1988 Article 61A allowed their use, and in 1989 it was legally recognized.

Ballot paper voting also had problems, such as booth capturing and ballot box theft. Many election reform bills were passed. In the 1989 Amethi election of Rajiv Gandhi, shots were fired, 21 FIRs were filed, and serious injuries occurred to his opponents, including Rajmohan Gandhi, grandson of Mahatma Gandhi, and former Union Minister Dr. Sanjay Singh. I highlight how electoral irregularities surfaced during Congress regimes—Indira Gandhi's election being invalidated, retrospective changes in office-of-profit rules, and violent episodes like Amethi. After the 1990s, with BJP's rise, electoral reforms accelerated—voter ID cards, central forces, booth-wise counting, and CCTV. The Modi government reduced cash donations from 20,000 to 2,000 and ensured VVPAT transparency. I also point out that with increasing transparency, Congress stopped winning majorities, and its allegations about EVM manipulation stand contradicted. Congress only raises allegations but neither demands CCTV footage nor follows due process—like a student who refuses scrutiny or a cricket team that avoids DRS yet complains. Making sensational statements abroad also carries no political substance.The 1974 nuclear test was not conducted for a bomb. The government's official statement was that it was solely for peaceful purposes. In contrast, when Atal Bihari Vajpayee's government conducted nuclear tests in 1998, India declared, "We are now a nuclear power."

In Bihar and elsewhere, Congress's vote share has steadily declined—so what exactly was "stolen", that is the question. I clarify that Congress's mismatch between vote share and seats arises from uneven vote distribution, which they refuse to understand. Examples from several states show how margins vary widely. Accusing both EVMs and voter rolls simultaneously is also illogical. Ultimately, Congress must understand the real arithmetic of democracy and the shifting choices of voters. I state that the opposition spreads misinformation on every issue—CAA, Waqf, and constitutional reforms—and often ends up defending illegal practices. I remind that after Atal ji's government fell in 1999, elections were delayed six months and that Election Commissioner later became a minister. Institutions were compromised earlier as well—a former Congress leader became a Supreme Court judge, and a Chief Justice was appointed without a law degree. The opposition selectively criticizes the Election Commission, treating citizens as if they won't notice. They also spread falsehoods on Rafale, surgical strikes, HAL, LIC, SBI, Covid, and even the Ram Mandir, despite facts proving otherwise. Finally, I note that their reliance on caste-based "shortcut politics" in Bihar and elsewhere has now lost all relevance.

Concluding my speech, I want to give some suggestions. Elections are now in the era of technology and AI, and by the next Lok Sabha elections, the risk of misuse will increase. The government should take definite measures, and people should focus on authenticating their AI signatures, i.e., AI prints. For candidates who are not from recognized political parties, the number of proposers should be increased so that serious people can enter politics. The use of offensive and violent language in politics should also be curtailed, as personal and abusive remarks during elections can increase social unrest. Extremist politics and compromises show how crucial strategy is in elections. Finally, I want to say that the country is changing. As per the predictions of Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo, India is taking a new form.

£**MS. DOLA SEN:** I want to state with complete clarity that Bengal is being systematically targeted, misrepresented, and humiliated for political purposes. Our rightful MGNREGA dues have been withheld for years, while Ministers repeatedly circulate falsehoods about Bengal in Parliament yet avoid releasing any White Paper that could be examined by the public. In several Double Engine states, simply speaking Bengali is enough for people to be labelled as foreigners, detained, or pushed back to the border. This coordinated humiliation is intended to create fear among citizens and undermine Bengal's cultural and political identity. The incident involving pregnant Sonali Khatun and others, who were forcibly taken and illegally pushed back without allowing them to speak or defend their citizenship, is a shocking example of the erosion of civil liberties. The Supreme Court had to intervene and remind the government that anyone born and raised in India is a legitimate citizen deserving of fairness and protection. Despite the Supreme Court's censure, Sunali's family members remain imprisoned in Bangladesh, which reflects a deeper institutional failure and a lack of accountability. These events raise critical questions about how the government chooses to treat its own people and whose interests are being served by such actions. I must also ask why the 2002 voter list has been arbitrarily chosen as the benchmark for citizenship verification when all lists prior to the 2009 delimitation have lost constitutional relevance. This choice lacks legal rationale and appears aimed at selectively excluding voters. In some states, an SIR process is conducted, while in others, only a simple revision occurs—revealing political bias rather than administrative necessity. Due to this, lakhs of genuine voters are being excluded, particularly women whose addresses change after marriage, youth born after 2002, and migrant workers with unstable documentation.

In a country where so many citizens struggle daily for food and basic survival, demanding multiple documents—birth certificates, school records, passports, and proof of residence—is unrealistic and unjust. Only a small percentage of births are institutional, and only a minority of Indians possess passports or formal educational certificates. Farmers, sharecroppers, labourers, domestic workers, and those in the unorganised sector often do not have the documents being insisted upon. Implementing such a rigid verification process risks rendering large numbers of genuine citizens stateless, similar to what was witnessed in Assam where lakhs were excluded but very few infiltrators were found. We strongly oppose both the deletion of legitimate voters and the addition of outsiders through duplicate EPIC cards. The burden of establishing citizenship cannot be shifted entirely onto individuals; it is the Election Commission's duty to ensure that every eligible citizen is included and protected.

What is happening now is an alarming shift: earlier, people elected governments, but now the government seems to want the power to decide who counts as a citizen. This reversal threatens the core of democracy. The right to vote is not a favour granted by any ruling party—it is an inviolable constitutional right. Any attempt to weaken or undermine it is a direct assault on the foundations of our Republic. This entire approach of detecting, deleting, excluding, and frightening citizens is authoritarian and incompatible with democratic values. True patriotism lies not in labelling people as outsiders, but in defending their rights, dignity, and constitutional status. *My vote, my right.* No government, no authority, and no administrative process can be allowed to strip an Indian citizen of this fundamental right.

SHRI N.R. ELANGO: We must carefully examine the Constitution of India, the Representation of the People Acts of 1950 and 1951, the Conduct of Elections Rules, 1961, and the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960. These laws collectively define voter qualifications, constituency structure, election procedures, and Parliament's authority to frame rules. Article 324 grants wide powers to the Election Commission, while Articles 325, 326 and 327 deal with voter eligibility and legislative competence. I have divided my remarks into two parts—conduct of elections and electoral rolls—and I believe the SIR process functions as a selective inclusion and removal mechanism. I wish to state that the SIR process is being opposed by almost all political parties because it is unconstitutional, illegal, poorly timed, and places unnecessary hardship on citizens. More importantly, it attempts to usurp the powers of Parliament, and even the authority of the Home Ministry. My approach today is entirely apolitical; I speak only from the standpoint of law and electoral reforms. Our aim is to ensure clean and fool-proof elections, but the present system does not meet that

£ Spoke in Bengali.

standard. Under Section 169(2)(ee) of the Representation of the People Act, Parliament alone has the power to prescribe the method of voting through EVMs. Yet, Rule 49A of the Conduct of Elections Rules gives the Election Commission full authority to approve EVM designs. This is where the problem begins: neither Parliament nor voters know the design, and later the VVPAT system was added without adequate scrutiny. Courts have repeatedly expressed concerns, and even in 2024 the ECI's own FAQ shows contradictions—for instance, political parties are given machines only for randomisation and mock polls, while complex devices like the VVPAT require additional controllers and loading units. There is also no clear guideline for counting Electronically Transmitted Postal Ballots (ETPBs), creating confusion and disputes. Therefore, I urge reforms to the 1961 Rules, including proper Form 17C and transparent standards for ETPB counting.

Regarding SIR, its practical difficulties are enormous: unreasonable timelines, ill-equipped BLOs, delays in printing forms, lack of monitoring, Aadhaar being treated as mandatory while additional documents are still demanded, difficulty in searching old rolls, mismatch with earlier SIRs, and digitisation errors from handwritten forms. Categories like absent, dead and shifted voters are being inflated, and in states like Tamil Nadu lakhs of deletions are feared. The SIR was even conducted during monsoon, worsening field conditions. But the deeper issue is institutional overreach. In an affidavit, the ECI has claimed before the Supreme Court that no parliamentary law can limit its jurisdiction and that Parliament must respect its plenary powers even under Article 327. This is alarming, for no institution can claim supremacy over Parliament. Men may come and go, but unchecked power can endanger democracy itself. The ECI now seeks to decide citizenship—something only the Home Ministry is authorised to determine. Constitutional morality, as Dr. Ambedkar explained, requires a presumption of citizenship. Instead, the ECI demands proof based on birth categories: documents for those born before 1987; one parent's document for those born between 1987–2004; and documents of both parents for those born after 2004. This shift from inclusion to suspicion is unacceptable.

I wish to highlight serious concerns regarding voter enumeration and the recent actions of the Election Commission of India. Today, many vulnerable groups—single-parent children, abandoned transgender persons and others—struggle even to produce basic documents. I ask: have we examined these deep social issues before framing voter-listing requirements? I am also deeply disturbed by a new condition applied in 12 States: that a person who was an ordinary resident and voter in Bihar on 1 July 2025 can become a voter in any other State by November. This violates the basic requirement that a voter must be an ordinary resident of the constituency. How can someone shift State-wise electoral residency in just three months? Such decisions effectively override the powers of the Home Ministry, Parliament and even the courts, making the ECI appear to assume unconstitutional authority. Therefore, I ask whether the Government endorses this stand of the ECI, whether it plans to allow the ECI to determine citizenship, and whether it intends to grant the ECI unchecked powers that may one day undermine democracy itself. I am calling for transparency, accountability and a system where tampering is impossible—not merely improbable. I urge the Government, this House and all political parties to take these concerns seriously. Electoral integrity must stand above victory or defeat, and must remain beyond doubt for every citizen.

SHRI SANJAY SINGH: I begin by reminding this House of the importance of the right to vote — a right earned through the sacrifices of our freedom fighters and martyrs. Today, the spirit of equal suffrage granted by Babasaheb Ambedkar is being weakened by processes like SIR. I question whether the intention is to clean the voter list or to clean out the voters themselves, because a climate of fear has spread across the country. Article 327 of the Constitution clearly states that the power related to elections and voter lists lies with Parliament; the Election Commission must function only according to those rules. But today, the Election Commission is taking decisions whose legal authority is doubtful.I point out that the Commission does not have sweeping powers to conduct SIR — it can do so only in special circumstances and with recorded reasons in limited areas. Yet SIR is being carried out across the entire country. I cite the example of the Delhi elections, where a large number of votes were deleted and irregularities occurred. In Bihar, as many as 65 lakh votes were deleted, and in many seats this deletion exceeded or matched the winning margin.I also question the reliability of EVMs, reminding everyone that it was BJP leaders who first raised doubts and wrote books claiming that EVMs threaten democracy. Several countries around the world have banned

EVMs. If the Prime Minister is truly so popular, then why fear elections by ballot?I further hold the Government accountable for the politics of fear spread in the name of "infiltrators." In 11 years, only 315 foreign nationals were found — 78 of them Muslims, and the rest Nepalese Hindus. Then why this waste of public money on detention centres? I argue that if someone is found to be an illegal foreigner, they should simply be sent back to their country, not housed and maintained here at the people's expense.Finally, I highlight the suffering of ordinary citizens like Noorjahan, an 80-year-old woman from Rampur, against whom an FIR was filed merely because she submitted voter forms for her two sons living in Kuwait — despite the Election Commission's own rules allowing Indian citizens abroad to remain voters in India. I make it clear that this entire process is weakening democracy, and I warn the Government that any tampering with voting rights is an injustice to both the people and the Constitution.

SHRI YERRAM VENKATA SUBBA REDDY: I rise to express my deep concern about the direction our democracy is taking and the crucial role of the Election Commission, which must remain non-partisan, transparent and independent so that 140 crore citizens never lose faith in it.I begin with the SIR process, which has now become a matter of national anxiety. As I see it, SIR is a rushed, full-scale reset of voter lists with door-to-door checks and tight deadlines. Booth Level Officers are under immense pressure, citizens were not properly informed and procedures vary from district to district. This has created fear that genuine voters are being removed without their knowledge. The fact that the Supreme Court has had to hear multiple petitions on SIR itself shows the scale of public doubt.I then highlight the irregularities that took place in the 2024 Andhra Pradesh elections. I point out vote-count discrepancies and data that defy logic—such as Assembly votes exceeding Parliamentary votes although both were cast together. Some polling stations even recorded more votes than electors. In one booth in Hindupur, the Parliamentary candidate got 472 votes but the Assembly candidate got only one.I also note the denial of CCTV footage to candidates and the inexplicable rise in poll percentages after the official close of polling. All of this, in my view, raises serious questions about electoral integrity.I stress that unless these issues are addressed honestly, our democratic journey in the coming years will remain under threat.

SHRI SUBHASISH KHUNTIA: I want to say that the right to vote is the soul of our democracy, and it is this right that determines the direction of our nation. Looking at the conditions in Odisha, I wish to point out that Adivasis, Dalits, backward classes, single women, extremely poor families and migrant workers live in difficult hilly and river-crossing regions where reaching them is itself a challenge. Because of this, the processes of BLO (Booth Level Officer) and SIR (Special Revision of Electoral Roll) become even more difficult for them.I have observed that during the SIR process, many eligible citizens are being marked as absent, shifted or duplicate and are being removed from the voter list. This is not merely an administrative error but a denial of their rightful participation. On the other hand, BLOs, working with limited resources, challenging geography and heavy workload, need better training, resources, technical support and clear guidelines.People's expectations are simple—clear procedures, clean processes and fair outcomes. Article 325 entrusts us with the responsibility of ensuring that the voter list is complete, inclusive and free from discrimination. I believe that as the world's largest democracy, we must now take serious steps towards becoming the most transparent and trustworthy democracy.

DR. M. THAMBIDURAI: I wish to clarify from my experience as a former Law Minister that neither I nor any Minister ever interfered in the functioning of the Election Commission, which has always been treated as an independent body. Since a DMK Member levelled allegations, I remind the House that the DMK itself was once part of the NDA and should clarify whether it ever sought favours from the Law or Home Ministry. My focus is only on reforms. The SIR process becomes crucial when electoral rolls contain serious discrepancies. In Tamil Nadu's Tambaram Constituency, I have authenticated cases where one house shows 114 voters and another address lists 360 voters. Such errors raise concerns about how rolls are maintained and how the ruling DMK may be benefiting. Without entering sub judice matters, I only stress that maintaining accurate rolls is the Election Commission's duty. When such anomalies persist and advantage a ruling party, democratic integrity is weakened, and timely revision is essential for fair and transparent elections.

(Speech unfinished)

Dicussion not concluded.

P. C. MODY,
Secretary-General.

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