RAJYA SABHA

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***SYNOPSIS OF DEBATE**

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(Proceedings other than Questions and Answers)

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Monday, March 09, 2026/ Phalguna 18, 1947 (Saka)

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OBITUARY REFERENCES

MR. CHAIRMAN: Hon'ble Members, it is with profound sorrow that I refer to the passing away of Shri Mukul Roy, Dr. Janardhan Waghmare and Shri H.K. Dua, former Members of this House.

Shri Mukul Roy passed away on the 23rd of February, 2026, at the age of 71 years. He served as a Member of the Rajya Sabha representing the State of West Bengal for two terms - from 2006 to 2012 and from 2012 to 2017. Born on 17th April, 1954, at Kanchrapara in North 24 Parganas District of West Bengal, Shri Mukul Roy entered public life at a young age and emerged as prominent political figure in his State and at the national level. Shri Mukul Roy served as the Minister of Railways in the year 2012 and earlier as Minister of State in the Ministries of Shipping and Railways from 2009 to 2012 during his second term in this House. In this House, Shri Roy served as Chairman of the Committee on Transport, Tourism and Culture. Shri Mukul Roy evinced keen interest in social and cultural activities, and was closely associated with several community development initiatives including illiteracy eradication programmes. In the passing away of Shri Mukul Roy, the country has lost an experienced parliamentarian and a dedicated public personality.

Dr. Janardhan Waghmare passed away on the 2nd of March, 2026, at the age of 91 years. He served as a Member of the Rajya Sabha representing the State of Maharashtra from April 2008 to April 2014. Born on 11th of November, 1934, at the village Kavtha in Latur District of Maharashtra, Dr. Waghmare was an eminent educationist, social reformer and distinguished parliamentarian. A prolific writer, Dr. Waghmare authored a number of books in Marathi, Hindi and English in the field of education, literature, social reform and philosophy. His literary contributions earned him several prestigious awards including the Maharashtra Bhushan Award and other honours from the Government of Maharashtra. Dr. Waghmare, inspired by the ideals of social justice and equality, worked tirelessly for the upliftment of dalits and other marginalized communities, and established a village named Rashtriya Seva Gram in the earthquake-affected region of Latur, where families from different castes were encouraged to live together in harmony. In the passing away of Dr. Janardhan Waghmare, the country has lost a distinguished educationist, an accomplished author and a dedicated parliamentarian.

Shri H.K. Dua passed away on the 4th of March, 2026, at the age of 88 years. He served as a nominated Member of this august House from 18th November, 2009 to 17th November, 2015. Born on the 1st of July, 1937, at Sargodha in Punjab, Shri H.K. Dua was an eminent journalist and political commentator. Educated at Punjab University, he had a distinguished career in journalism, spanning several decades. Shri H.K. Dua also rendered distinguished services in public life. He served as Press Advisor to two Prime Ministers – Shri H.D. Devegowda and Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee – and later as Ambassador of India to Denmark from 2001 to 2003. During his tenure in the Rajya Sabha, he served on several Parliamentary Committees.

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

A recipient of the Padma Bhushan, Shri H. K. Dua Ji, was honoured with several prestigious awards for excellence in journalism. His contributions to public discourse and to the strengthening of democratic values will be remembered with respect and admiration.

In the passing away of Shri H. K. Dua Ji, the nation has lost a distinguished journalist, a thoughtful public intellectual and an able parliamentarian.

We deeply mourn the passing away of Shri Mukul Roy Ji, Dr. Janardhan Waghmare Ji and Shri H. K. Dua Ji.

(One Minute's silence was observed as a mark of respect to the memories of the departed.)

FELICITATIONS BY THE CHAIR

MR. CHAIRMAN: Hon'ble Members, yesterday was a moment of national pride, as the Indian cricket team won the prestigious ICC Men's T20 World Cup, defeating New Zealand cricket team in the final by a formidable margin at Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad. This victory marks India's third T20 World Cup triumph and, significantly, it is also a back-to-back title, with India having won the previous edition as well. The achievement is even more historic as India has become the first host nation ever to win the ICC Men's T20 World Cup, making this accomplishment truly special for the country.

The team's outstanding performance throughout the tournament has brought immense joy and pride to millions of cricket lovers across the country.

On behalf of the House, I extend our heartiest congratulations to the players, the support staff and all those associated with Indian cricket for this outstanding achievement. The House wishes them continued success in the years to come.

PROCLAMATION UNDER ARTICLE 356 OF THE CONSTITUTION

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS (SHRI NITYANAND RAI): Sir, I lay on the Table, a copy (in English and Hindi) of the Proclamation [S.O. 509(E)], issued by the President under clause (2) of article 356 of the Constitution on the 4th February, 2026, revoking the Proclamation issued by her on the 13th February, 2025, in relation to the State of Manipur with effect from the 4th February, 2026.

SUO-MOTO STATEMENT BY MINISTER

The Situation in West Asia

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI S. JAISHANKAR): I rise to inform the House about the recent developments in West Asia, which are a matter of serious concern. The current round of conflict began on 28 February 2026 and involves fighting between Israel and the United States on one side and Iran on the other. The conflict has also spread to several Gulf countries, leading to casualties, including among Iranian leadership, and significant destruction of infrastructure. From the outset, the Government expressed deep concern and urged all sides to exercise restraint, avoid escalation, and prioritize civilian safety. We continue to believe that dialogue and diplomacy are the best means to de-escalate tensions while respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states in the region.

Given the seriousness of the situation, the Cabinet Committee on Security met on 1 March under the Prime Minister's chairmanship. The Committee reviewed the airstrikes in Iran, the subsequent attacks across the region, and the possible implications for regional security, economic

activities, and the safety of Indian nationals. Particular attention was paid to difficulties faced by Indian travellers, students, and others transiting the region. The Prime Minister is closely monitoring developments, and all relevant ministries are coordinating efforts to address emerging challenges.

This conflict is of special concern to India because of our close proximity and strong economic and human links with the region. Nearly one crore Indians live and work in the Gulf countries, and several thousand Indians reside in Iran for study or employment. The region is also crucial for India's energy security and is a major trading partner, accounting for around USD 200 billion in trade annually. Therefore, the ongoing instability, supply-chain disruptions, and attacks on merchant shipping are serious matters for us. Unfortunately, we have already lost two Indian mariners in such incidents and one remains missing, and I express deep condolences to their families.

The Government has been closely monitoring the situation since the 12-day war in June 2025. As tensions rose, advisories were issued to Indian nationals. On 5 January 2026, Indians were advised to avoid non-essential travel to Iran and those already there were urged to register with the Embassy. A stronger advisory was issued on 14 January, and similar guidance was issued to Indian seafarers by the Directorate General of Shipping. Later, on 14 February, the Indian Embassy in Tehran urged Indian nationals, including students and pilgrims, to leave Iran using available transport and to contact the Embassy for assistance. These advisories were repeated on 23 February.

After the conflict began on 28 February, our Embassy facilitated the relocation of Indian students within Iran and helped pilgrims and businesspersons move to safer areas or cross borders to countries such as Armenia to return home. The Embassy in Tehran remains fully operational and on high alert to support the Indian community. A Quick Response Team has also been established by the Directorate General of Shipping to assist Indian seafarers.

Our embassies across the region—including in Israel, the UAE, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Oman, and Iraq—have issued advisories and remain in close contact with Indian nationals. The Ministry of External Affairs has also set up a special control room to handle queries from affected individuals and their families. Our diplomats have helped stranded passengers in transit hubs like Dubai, Doha, and Abu Dhabi and facilitated border crossings where possible. Whenever airspace has partially opened, commercial and non-scheduled flights have been arranged to bring Indians home. So far, about 67,000 Indian nationals have returned, and multiple inbound flights continue to operate daily.

Throughout this period, the Government has maintained close contact with countries in the region. The Prime Minister has spoken with several leaders, including those of the UAE, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman, Jordan, and Israel, all of whom assured that the welfare of the Indian community would remain a priority. I have also remained in touch with my counterparts and have spoken with Iran's Foreign Minister on multiple occasions.

I would also like to inform the House that an Iranian vessel, IRIS Lavan, docked in Kochi after Iran requested permission for three ships to use Indian ports. The crew are currently in Indian naval facilities, and this humanitarian gesture has been appreciated by the Iranian side.

Finally, the Government is carefully monitoring the implications of the conflict for India's energy security. We remain committed to safeguarding supplies while ensuring that the interests of Indian consumers are protected. Our diplomacy continues to support Indian energy enterprises during this volatile period.

In conclusion, our approach is guided by three principles: India strongly advocates peace and a return to dialogue and diplomacy; the safety and well-being of the Indian community in the region is our foremost priority; and India's national interests, including energy security and trade, will remain paramount. I am confident that the Government will have the full support of the House in addressing this challenging situation.

MATTERS RAISED WITH THE PERMISSION OF THE CHAIR

1. Need for Permanent Conversion of Train No. 09639/09640 Madar (Ajmer)-Rohtak Special into a Daily Intercity Superfast Express

SHRIMATI REKHA SHARMA: I wish to raise an important issue regarding Train No. 09639/09640 Madar (Ajmer)–Rohtak Special, which is presently operated as a special service between Rajasthan and Haryana. This train provides vital direct rail connectivity between Ajmer and key districts of Haryana such as Rewari, Narnaul, Jhajjar and Rohtak, and is widely used by daily commuters. Since this train is operated under the 'special category', passengers face uncertainty regarding its continuity and reservation facilities remain limited. In the absence of a permanent daily service on this route, passengers are often compelled to change multiple trains, causing inconvenience and additional travel time. Therefore, I urge the Government to permanently convert Train No. 09639/09640 into a Daily Intercity Superfast Express, which will improve regional connectivity between Haryana and Rajasthan and provide greater convenience to passengers.

(Several hon'ble Members associated.)

2. Demand for a Direct New Rail Line from Nanded to Latur

SHRI ASHOKRAO SHANKARRAO CHAVAN: Nanded and Latur are two important cities of the Marathwada region, but there is still no direct rail link between them. At present, trains from Nanded to Latur travel via Parbhani, covering a distance of about 212 kilometres and taking nearly six hours, whereas the road distance between the two cities is much shorter. Therefore, a proposal has been made to construct a new direct rail line of about 104 kilometres between Nanded and Latur, which will significantly reduce travel time. The Government of Maharashtra has already decided to contribute 50 percent of the project cost, and the final location survey has also been completed. Hence, I urge the Central Government to approve this important project at the earliest, as it will improve rail connectivity and transportation facilities between Marathwada and other regions.

(Shrimati Sumitra Balmik associated.)

3. Concern over the Increasing Incidence of Road Accidents Caused by Drunk Driving

DR. MEDHA VISHRAM KULKARNI: I would like to draw the attention of the House to the growing problem of road accidents in the country. According to the available data, more than 1,80,000 people lost their lives in road accidents in the country in the year 2024. In Maharashtra, 15,400 people died in 36,000 road accidents in 2024. According to the data of Pune Police, in Pune alone, 320 people lost their lives and 1,320 were injured in 1,404 road accidents. This situation clearly reflects the seriousness of the problem. I would like to state that about 60 per cent of the victims of road accidents in the country are young people between the ages of 18 and 34, who represent the most productive segment of our population. The major causes of these accidents include over-speeding, negligence, driving under the influence of alcohol, continued use of old transport vehicles even after the expiry of their permitted life, and new trends such as making reels or photo shoots while driving, which distract the driver. Although driving under the influence of alcohol is a punishable offence under the Motor Vehicles Act, in many cases the offenders easily escape despite violating the rules. Therefore, I demand that there should be strict punishment for drunken and reckless driving. AI-based speed detection systems, breath analysers and CCTV surveillance should be widely implemented, and victims of road accidents and their families should receive immediate and adequate compensation. At the same time, widespread awareness on road safety should be promoted in schools and colleges.

(Several hon. Members associated.)

4. Demand for Conferment of the Bharat Ratna (Posthumous) on Late Shri Ratan Naval Tata

SHRI GOVINDBHAI LALJIBHAI DHOLAKIA: Through this House, I wish to urge that Shri Ratan Tata, who made extraordinary contributions to nation-building, should be conferred with India's highest civilian honour, the *Bharat Ratna*. I believe that he was not merely an industrialist but

a moral guide for Indian industry, who demonstrated that honesty and success can go together even in the challenging environment of global business. Through the Tata Trusts, he dedicated a large part of his wealth to cancer research, education and rural development, thereby improving the lives of the underprivileged sections of society. Therefore, I believe that conferring the Bharat Ratna on him would not merely honour an individual but would recognise the spirit of national service, character and values that he exemplified through his life. Through you, I request the Government to kindly consider this proposal sympathetically.

(Several hon. Members associated.)

5. Demand for Implementation of Reservation Policy in Government Departments for Outsourced and Contractual Employment

DR. SUMER SINGH SOLANKI: I would like to draw the attention of the Government and this House to a very important issue. In various government departments, recruitments made through outsourcing and contractual arrangements do not provide reservation for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes, which goes against the spirit of the Constitution. Today, many posts are being filled through outsourcing where there is no provision for reservation, promotion, social security or job stability. This situation is directly affecting the youth belonging to SC/ST and OBC communities and creating a sense of disappointment among them. Therefore, I urge the Government to make reservation mandatory in outsourced and contractual recruitments, review the ongoing recruitments and constitute a high-level parliamentary committee to examine this matter.

(Several hon. Members associated.)

6. Need to Strengthen the '*Prashasan Gaon Ki Ore*' Initiative for Empowering Rural Women

SHRIMATI SANGEETA YADAV: Through you, I would like to congratulate the Government of India for the '*Prashasan Gaon Ki Ore*' campaign. This initiative is a commendable effort to bring administration closer to the villages and ensure good governance at the doorstep of common citizens. I believe that this campaign is especially important for rural women who often hesitate to present their issues due to social inhibitions, lack of information and the complexity of administrative procedures. Therefore, I request the Government to further strengthen this initiative so that rural women can get a strong platform for dialogue, trust and participation. I would like to say that certain important steps should be taken to make the '*Prashasan Gaon Ki Ore*' initiative more effective. I suggest that a system of '*Mahila Shasan Sahayogi*' be introduced, under which trained local young women can be associated with panchayats so that they can act as an information bridge between the administration and rural women. Along with this, through programmes such as 'Mission Vishwas', rural women should be made aware of administrative procedures, grievance redressal mechanisms and their rights. I would also like to urge that women-centric camps be organised, a simple and confidential complaint mechanism be developed, and the benefits of this initiative be extended to as many women as possible through both offline and online modes so that their trust in the administration and their participation can increase.

(Several Hon'ble Members associated.)

7. Demand for Government Intervention to Curb the Spread of Fake Low-Denomination Currency Notes Affecting the National Economy

DR. AJEET MADHAVRAO GOPCHADE: I would like to draw the attention of the House to the increasing circulation of counterfeit Indian currency in the country, particularly in lower denominations such as ₹200, ₹100, ₹50 and ₹20 notes. These fake notes are spreading in small towns, semi-urban areas and villages, causing hardship to ordinary citizens, especially the poor, farmers, labourers and small shopkeepers. I would like to say that if an honest citizen voluntarily reports a counterfeit note, he or she should not suffer any financial loss and should be fully refunded from the government treasury. In addition, there should be a simple reporting mechanism in banks, and a joint task force of the RBI, NIA and ED should be constituted to deal with this issue. I believe that strict

action against counterfeit currency networks and periodic upgrading of security features in currency notes can effectively curb this menace.

(Several Hon'ble Members associated.)

8. Concern over Theft and Smuggling of India's Cultural Heritage and Antiquities

DR. MEENAKSHI JAIN: I wish to draw the attention of the House to the growing menace of smuggling and theft of India's cultural heritage. Like many former colonies, India has seen important symbols of its civilisation taken abroad, such as the Piprahwa Relics of Buddha discovered in 1898, a large portion of which were taken to England. Even after independence, idols and artefacts from temples and archaeological sites continue to be stolen and sold to museums and galleries overseas. Although the UNESCO Convention aims to curb this trade, its success has been limited because institutions demand proof that the artefacts were stolen. I would therefore suggest that digital documentation and mapping of our heritage sites and artefacts be undertaken so that ownership can be clearly established and our civilisational heritage better protected.

(Several hon'ble Members associated.)

9. Concern over Rising Levels of Anaemia and Malnutrition among Adolescent Girls in Madhya Pradesh

SHRIMATI MAYA NAROLIYA: I would like to draw the attention of the House to the serious problem of anaemia and malnutrition among adolescent girls in the Narmadapuram division of Madhya Pradesh. According to available data, a large number of adolescent girls in this region are suffering from anaemia. Despite initiatives such as *Poshan Abhiyaan* and *Anaemia Free Bharat*, the benefits are not reaching effectively due to lack of awareness, disruptions in supply and infrastructural challenges. Therefore, I urge the Government to treat this issue as a priority, strengthen the monitoring mechanism and enhance coordination so that adolescent girls receive proper nutrition and health support.

(Several hon'ble Members associated.)

DISCUSSION ON WORKING OF MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT, FOREST AND CLIMATE CHANGE

SHRI GHANSHYAM TIWARI, initiating the discussion, said: While participating in the discussion on the Demands for Grants related to climate change and environment, I would like to say that India's culture and traditions have always been closely connected with nature and the environment. When the first Earth Summit was held in the world, the Indian representative, Shri P. V. Narasimha Rao, recited the Shanti Mantra, praying for peace for the sky, the earth, the waters, the medicinal plants, and the entire universe. This clearly reflects that the idea of environmental protection has been deeply rooted in Indian philosophy since ancient times. In our country, rivers, mountains, and forests have always held special significance. Our civilization developed along riverbanks, and we have accepted the Earth as our mother. The Yajurveda also describes the Earth as a mother and human beings as her children, while the sky is considered the father. Our scriptures consistently convey the message of respect for and protection of nature.

We are not only worshippers of nature but also respect trees and vegetation. In ancient times, Acharya Charak described nearly 5,500 medicinal plants and explained their properties for the welfare of humanity. In our society, there has been a tradition of worshipping trees such as the peepal, banyan, amla, and tulsi, which strengthens the spirit of nature conservation. However, with the passage of time, industrialization, the rapid growth of vehicles, expansion of wars, and population growth have increased pressure on the environment. The number of forests and wildlife has declined, while air pollution and waste management issues have grown. To address these challenges, the government has taken several important steps.

I would like to point out that in 2012–13 the budget of the Ministry of Environment was around ₹2,430 crore, while in the Budget for 2026–27 it has been increased to ₹3,759.46 crore. This

increase reflects not only a rise in financial allocation but also an expansion of policies and programmes. For the conservation of wetlands, an international convention was held in Ramsar, Iran, in 1971. In 2014, India had only 26 Ramsar sites, but by 2026 their number has increased to 98. This is a significant achievement in the field of environmental conservation. Cities such as Udaipur and Indore have also received international recognition as Wetland Cities.

There has also been remarkable progress in forest conservation. By 2025, India reached the ninth position in the world in forest development and the third position in terms of annual growth. To provide cleaner air in cities, 620 urban forests are being developed at a cost of ₹654 crore, which will increase green cover and provide cleaner air to people. For pollution monitoring, about 1,600 monitoring stations have been set up across the country. As a result, PM-10 levels have declined in 103 cities, and about a 40 percent reduction has been recorded in 25 cities. For this purpose, ₹1,091 crore has been allocated in the Budget for 2026–27.

In addition, the Parivesh 2.0 programme has been launched to provide integrated clearances, environmental assessment, and real-time monitoring for processes such as no-objection certificates, licences, and industrial approvals. There had been a major issue regarding land titles for tribal communities living in forest areas. To address this, under the Forest Rights Act, 25 lakh titles have been granted out of 50 lakh claims, thereby recognizing the ancestral rights of tribal communities who have protected forests for generations. Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the campaign "One Tree in the Name of Mother", under which 2.624 billion saplings have been planted so far, and 60 million people have participated in Mission LiFE. Significant steps have also been taken for waste management, and 372.11 million tonnes of waste have been recycled and converted from waste to wealth.

Important progress has also been made in wildlife conservation. In 2010, India had 1,706 tigers, but by 2022 the number had increased to 3,682. Today, about 75 percent of the world's tigers are found in India. Under the Panchamrit commitments announced by the Prime Minister, targets have been set to achieve 500 gigawatts of non-fossil energy capacity by 2030, meet 50 percent of energy requirements from renewable sources, reduce emissions as well as carbon intensity, and achieve net-zero emissions by 2070. Significant progress has also been made in the energy sector: from 78 gigawatts in 2014, the capacity increased to 174 gigawatts by 2023. Under the PM Ujjwala Yojana, nearly 100 million families have been provided LPG connections, reducing the use of biomass fuel and lowering pollution levels.

Additionally, through Mission LiFE, environmentally sustainable lifestyles are being promoted. The National Green Hydrogen Mission has been launched, and initiatives such as Mission Mausam have been introduced for accurate weather forecasting. Nearly 99 percent of the railway network has been electrified, and the use of electric vehicles is increasing rapidly, helping to reduce pollution. Through all these efforts, significant steps are being taken to protect the environment and tackle climate change. The government has also allocated ₹10,900 crore to promote electric vehicles, including incentives for electric two-wheelers, three-wheelers, and buses. In Delhi, a fleet of 500 electric buses has been launched, which is a major step toward clean transportation. Ethanol blending in petrol has reached about 18 percent, with a target of achieving 20 percent, which will save foreign exchange and strengthen energy security. The government is also promoting green energy through programmes such as the Green India Mission, carbon credit trading systems, and the National Solar Mission, which will encourage industries to reduce emissions and support environmental conservation. The Government of India continues to undertake several initiatives in the fields of transport, railways, environment, and climate change, while promoting tree plantation, forest conservation, and expansion of forest cover.

SHRI AYODHYA RAMI REDDY ALLA: In India, we have always regarded nature and environment as sacred, and this long-standing tradition should guide our policies. While discussing the functioning of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, we must look at the past, present and future together, particularly in the context of the goal of achieving *Viksit Bharat* by 2047. India has ranked low in several global environmental indicators such as air quality, emissions and ecosystem vitality. Although some improvement has been seen in climate policy due to the focus on

renewable energy in recent years, environmental degradation continues to impose a heavy burden on the economy. I also warn that the country faces a serious water crisis because of the imbalance between population and available freshwater resources. The environment should not only be viewed as a challenge but also as an economic opportunity. The development of a green economy can generate large investments, employment and significant reductions in carbon emissions. While India has already achieved considerable progress in non-fossil fuel electricity capacity, the vision of becoming a 30–40 trillion-dollar economy cannot be realized without parallel environmental transformation. Economic growth and environmental sustainability must move together.

The present institutional system suffers from structural weaknesses, including a very small budget for the Ministry and limited institutional capacity. Agencies such as the Central Pollution Control Board need to be significantly strengthened. Although India has comprehensive environmental laws, implementation remains weak because States and local authorities often lack adequate technical manpower and resources. Municipalities continue to face serious challenges in areas such as air pollution, wastewater treatment and solid waste management. I stress the need to transition towards a circular economy where waste is treated as a resource. A large informal workforce is currently engaged in waste management and must be integrated into a formal and regulated system. I suggest that the Ministry should undergo a comprehensive strategic review and move from being only a regulatory authority to an enabling institution that promotes resource security, green growth and sustainable development.

I recommend strengthening institutional capacity by increasing budgetary allocation, expanding technical manpower, improving Centre–State coordination and using digital technologies such as artificial intelligence and satellite monitoring for environmental governance. I also emphasize the need to expand environmental literacy and professional training. I conclude by stating that environmental protection is not merely an ecological issue but also a matter of national security, economic competitiveness and justice for future generations, and therefore environmental governance must be strengthened to achieve the vision of *Viksit Bharat*.

SHRI SUBHASISH KHUNTIA: Balancing environment and development has become one of the biggest challenges for the country. Although sustainable development is frequently discussed, in many places development activities continue to take place at the cost of the environment. There are examples of my State, Odisha, which is rich in biodiversity, forest resources and coastal ecosystems. Ecological assets such as Chilika Lake, the Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary, Bhitarkanika National Park and the Similipal Tiger Reserve are extremely important for biodiversity and also support the livelihoods of local communities. However, these ecological resources are facing serious threats due to large-scale mining and industrial activities. Odisha is rich in minerals such as iron ore, coal and bauxite, and intensive mining has led to environmental degradation and groundwater contamination in several districts. Many rivers in the State are under severe stress and that the dispute regarding the waters of the Mahanadi River has still not been resolved.

Climate change is altering weather patterns, resulting in irregular rainfall and rising temperatures, which are affecting agriculture and rural livelihoods. Air pollution has become a serious problem in industrial belts such as Angul and Talcher because of coal mining and thermal power plants. Even the capital city, Bhubaneswar, is facing increasing levels of urban pollution. I express concern that environmental clearances are sometimes granted without proper consent of local communities, even though legal provisions require such consent. I also highlight the problems of illegal mining and illegal sand extraction from riverbeds, which are damaging natural ecosystems and wildlife habitats. Large-scale tree felling in the name of development is causing the loss of natural forests and that plantations cannot replace natural ecosystems. This destruction of habitats is also increasing human–wildlife conflict. If forests, rivers and ecosystems are destroyed in the name of development, the entire society will suffer the consequences. Therefore, it is essential to adopt a development model that ensures a balance between environmental protection and economic growth while protecting the rights and livelihoods of local communities.

***SHRI MOKARIA RAMBHAI:** I rise in this august House to commend the exemplary work of the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change under the visionary leadership of Narendra Modi. I firmly support the Government's efforts, as environmental protection has been taken up as a national mission. Over the last few years, India has expanded its forest cover by more than 1,500 square kilometres, and programmes like the Green India Mission are strengthening forests and wildlife. I proudly note that in my State, the population of Asiatic lions in Gir National Park has crossed 700 due to dedicated conservation measures. I also express my gratitude to Bhupender Yadav for his leadership of the Ministry.Large-scale mangrove restoration—over 10,000 hectares in the last five years—has strengthened coastal protection and supported fishermen's livelihoods, particularly in the Kutch region. On climate action, India has made bold commitments at COP26, including achieving 500 GW of non-fossil energy capacity by 2030. Today, the country already generates more than 200 GW from renewable sources. Gujarat contributes significantly through the massive solar park at Charanka Solar Park, while schemes like the PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana are helping households adopt rooftop solar.I also underline the success of pollution control and sanitation initiatives. Programmes such as Swachh Bharat Abhiyan and Namami Gange have improved river health and urban cleanliness, while the National Clean Air Programme is improving air quality in many cities. Tree plantation drives like Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam have mobilised millions of people, and tribals are benefiting from schemes like Van Dhan Yojana.Wildlife conservation has made significant progress, with initiatives like Project Tiger helping increase the tiger population to around 3,000. India is also taking strong leadership globally by promoting green development and meeting climate commitments ahead of schedule.

In conclusion, I believe the Government under Narendra Modi is building a greener and stronger India. With increased funding for environmental programmes and strong public participation, we are moving steadily toward a sustainable and developed nation. I therefore extend my wholehearted support to the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change in its important mission.

DR. SUMER SINGH SOLANKI: I rise to participate in the discussion on the working of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change and wish to state that the Earth is our mother, and it is our duty to protect her. A clean Earth is the foundation of a healthy life, and protecting the planet means securing the future of coming generations. Under the leadership of the Hon'ble Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, India today is guiding the world in the field of environmental protection and inspiring nations to act responsibly toward nature.I come from the Nimad region of Madhya Pradesh, where the dense forests of Satpura and Vindhyachal are located. My life has always been close to nature, and I have seen how our tribal brothers and sisters share a deep relationship with water, forests, and land. In tribal society, nature is worshipped as a mother and as a deity. Because of this belief, they respect and protect trees, rivers, and every element of nature.I would also like to say that the Government under Prime Minister Modi has taken significant steps at both the budgetary and policy levels for environmental protection. In 2012–13, the budget allocated to the Ministry of Environment and Forests was about ₹2,430 crore, whereas in 2026–27 it has been increased to ₹3,759 crore. This reflects a growing commitment toward environmental governance. Similarly, there has been major progress in wetland conservation. In 2014, India had only 26 Ramsar sites, but by 2026 this number has increased to 98. It is also a matter of pride that Indore and Udaipur have been recognized as the country's first Ramsar Wetland Cities.India has also made notable progress in forest cover. According to the India State of Forest Report 2023, forest and tree cover in the country has been steadily increasing. As per the Global Forest Resources Assessment 2025, India ranks ninth in the world in terms of total forest area and third in net annual forest area increase. At the same time, through the Nagar Van Yojana, green spaces are being developed around cities so that urban areas can have green lungs and citizens can enjoy a cleaner environment.To ensure clean air, the Government has also taken strong measures under the National Clean Air Programme. Compared to 2017–18, by 2025 there has been a noticeable reduction in PM10 levels, which refer to particulate matter pollution, in 103 cities, and more than 40 percent reduction has been achieved in 25 cities. The

* Spoke in Gujarati.

2026–27 Budget has also allocated ₹1,091 crore for pollution control, reflecting the Government's commitment to ensuring clean air and better public health.I would like to mention a tradition from my tribal region. In the districts of Dhar, Jhabua, Alirajpur, Barwani, and Khargone in Madhya Pradesh, a ritual known as the worship of Indal Baba is performed, which is deeply connected to nature. In this ritual, trees such as saja, teak, and kalam are worshipped. These trees are neither cut nor burned, which sends a clear message that tribal communities consider the protection of nature as their sacred duty.Carrying forward this spirit, the Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi launched the campaign "Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam" (One Tree in the Name of Mother). Under this campaign, more than 262 crore saplings had been planted by the end of 2025. Monitoring is being carried out through the "Meri LIFE Portal," a digital platform, and through Mission LiFE—meaning a sustainable lifestyle—people are being encouraged to adopt environmentally friendly habits in their daily lives.Under the Forest Rights Act, significant steps have also been taken to grant rights to tribal communities. Earlier, about 15 to 16 lakh forest rights titles had been distributed, but now nearly 25 lakh titles have been granted and more than 50 lakh claims have been filed. This has ensured that tribal communities receive their rightful access to water, forests, and land.The Swachh Bharat Mission has also brought a major transformation in public awareness regarding cleanliness. Earlier, garbage used to be scattered across streets and lanes, but today people's mindset has changed. Cities like Indore have consistently set records in cleanliness, and thousands of village panchayats now have proper waste management systems. According to the Central Pollution Control Board, by 2025 about 375 lakh tonnes of waste had been recycled through formal systems.In addition, in 2024 the Government approved the Bio-E3 Policy—Biotechnology for Economy, Environment and Employment—which aims to integrate biotechnology with economic growth and environmental strategy. Through this policy, the target is to develop a bio-economy worth about 300 billion dollars by 2030.

In conclusion, I would like to say that under the leadership of Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, India is moving rapidly on the path of environmental protection, public participation, and sustainable development. Through respect for nature, preservation of tribal traditions, and modern policy initiatives, we are progressing toward building a green, clean, and prosperous India.

Before the CAMPA Act, approximately ₹66,000 crore lay unused. Now, these funds have been effectively utilized, and the Government has released these funds to states for afforestation, wildlife management, and forest restoration. The efforts of the National Tiger Conservation Authority have significantly increased the tiger population in India. Today, approximately 75 percent of the world's wild tigers are found in India. The Nagar Van Yojana has transformed vacant areas around cities into green spaces and encouraged people to plant trees. In the field of solar energy, initiatives like the Pradhan Mantri Kusum Yojana are providing affordable electricity to farmers. In the area I come from, electricity and irrigation facilities were previously limited, but now, through solar pumps, electricity connections, and other schemes, farmers and tribal families have access to numerous benefits. The distribution of forest rights pattas has economically empowered tribal communities and improved their quality of life. Under the Prime Minister's leadership, tribal areas are being developed. Continuous efforts are being made to improve the environment in the country.

DR. MEDHA VISHRAM KULKARNI: I congratulate the Hon'ble Prime Minister and the Ministry of Environment. Their efforts have promoted environmental protection in the country. In 2014, there were 26 Ramsar sites, which has now increased to 98, and forest area is also continuously increasing. Approximately ₹654 crore has been invested under the Urban Forest Scheme, and urban forests are being developed in more than 600 cities. In my city, Pune, the Warje Urban Forest has been developed, where thousands of trees have been planted on barren land, transforming it into a green forest area. Additionally, approximately ₹990 crore has been allocated for the Mula-Mutha River Pollution Control Project, with 85 percent contribution from the central government. Under this project, 11 sewage treatment plants are being constructed, which will help clean the city's river. Under the National Clean Air Program, approximately ₹271 crore has been allocated for Pune city, under which several initiatives are being implemented, including bus services, cycle tracks, and air quality measurement. Large-scale construction of toilets has been undertaken to improve sanitation and prevent open defecation, and solid waste management has mandated waste segregation and disposal at

the source. Effective implementation of government regulations should be ensured at the local level. Furthermore, projects to promote rainwater harvesting and improve groundwater levels should be approved from the MPLAD fund, further strengthening environmental protection.

Environmental protection training should be provided through school curriculum or co-curricular activities, so that people avoid habits like dumping garbage, chemicals, or religious materials into rivers and truly respect them as "mothers." Strict laws and strict enforcement are essential for environmental protection, as seen in many developed countries. Noise pollution is also a serious but often neglected problem. Awareness and strict regulations are essential to change habits like unnecessary honking. Furthermore, I welcome the government's decision to establish biodiversity parks. Such naturally occurring areas are crucial for environmental conservation. Such lands should be properly protected and developed to increase green cover and strengthen ecological balance. This issue does not fall within the jurisdiction of the Central Government. Nevertheless, I request that instructions be given to conserve the unallocated land of the Biodiversity Park, where slums and tin sheds have been built, and to plant trees there. Furthermore, I commend the efforts being made by the Government.

SHRI BRIJ LAL: I spent my childhood in the Terai forests, and my family is associated with the Devdah region, home to the Koliya clan. During Aurangzeb's time, many Koliya textile weavers were forced to convert to Islam and became known as Ansaris. My ancestors, to protect their religion, settled in the Terai forests near the Nepal border. It was there that I developed a deep connection with the forests, experiencing berries, wild vegetables, and other forest products. After completing my MSc, I also worked for a short time in the Indian Forest Service in 1977, hence my special affinity for forests. Today, India's forest cover is approximately 7.15 lakh square kilometers, and including tree cover, it has reached approximately 8.27 lakh square kilometers, or about 25.17 percent. This growth rate is steadily increasing, placing India third in the world. Forests are vital for our lives, oxygen, and climate balance, and increasing forest cover is a positive sign for the country. The tree cover was initially approximately 91,266 square kilometers, which has now increased to approximately 112,014 square kilometers. Through the "Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam" campaign, millions of trees were planted, and it has become a mass movement, increasing greenery even in urban areas. I shared my own experiences, sharing that I personally planted a variety of trees in the green belt, such as jamun, litchi, jackfruit, kamrakh, phalsa, and other fruit trees, which increased bird populations, purified the environment, and reduced dust. I also mentioned the importance of traditional trees like mahua, which is integral to tribal life and produces a variety of products. I also experimented with grafting mahua plants to make them bear fruit faster, resulting in mahua trees bearing fruit within about six years.

More nurseries should be established to promote trees like mahua, so that people become aware that with improved techniques these trees can start bearing fruit earlier. I emphasized that while the Forest Department has played a key role in increasing forest cover, the decline of Naxalism has also significantly helped in protecting forests and wildlife. Naxalite movement, which began in 1967, spread across a vast region and caused severe damage to forests, wildlife, and biodiversity. Illegal logging, poaching, mining, and the use of landmines harmed both animals and people. However, under the leadership of Narendra Modi and the efforts of Amit Shah, Naxalism is now nearing its end, and large forest areas that were once under their control have been freed. This has allowed forests and wildlife to recover. Wetlands function like the lungs of the environment by absorbing carbon, improving groundwater levels, and supporting biodiversity. I pointed out that internationally recognized wetlands under the Ramsar Convention have increased in India from only 26 earlier to 98 today. I recommended planting native trees such as mango, neem, jamun, tamarind, and mahua along highways and roadsides because they provide shade and support birds and wildlife. I also explained the ecological role of birds in helping seeds of trees like peepal and banyan germinate. I raised concerns about invasive foreign species such as Congress grass, water hyacinth, and lantana, which are damaging forests, water bodies, and agricultural lands. There is a need for policies and laws to control their spread. Additionally, I pointed out that foreign fish species like African catfish and Chinese carp are replacing native fish such as Rohu, Catla, and Mrigal in Indian rivers. Strict regulation is required to protect indigenous aquatic biodiversity. Finally, I appreciated the government’s efforts in wildlife conservation, especially Project Cheetah, and emphasized the

importance of developing wildlife corridors and infrastructure to ensure safe movement and protection of animals such as elephants and other species.

MS. SWATI MALIWAL: The biggest concern today is the severe air pollution in Delhi. Breathing in the city is equivalent to smoking about 50 cigarettes a day. In 2023, around 15% of deaths in Delhi were linked to air pollution, and millions of children have suffered permanent lung damage. In 2025, not even a single day recorded good air quality, indicating a serious public health crisis. I pointed out that the issue is not a lack of funds but a lack of intent, as the money collected under the Green Cess was not effectively used. Public transport must be strengthened because vehicular emissions are a major contributor, and Delhi currently has only about 5,000 buses instead of the required 10,000. The problem of stubble burning should be addressed by supporting farmers with compensation and technology. Emission control systems should be implemented in nearby thermal power plants, and dust control rules at construction sites must be strictly enforced. Finally, I demanded that the Commission for Air Quality Management be made more autonomous and provided with adequate resources, and that GST on air purifiers and water purifiers be removed. I concluded that this is a fight for our health, our children, and our future.

SHRI UJJWAL DEORAO NIKAM: I recall a well-known line from the Atharva Veda: *"Mata Bhumih Putro Aham Prithivyah"*, which means "The Earth is my mother and I am her son." This reflects India's ancient philosophy of living in harmony with nature rather than destroying it. Under the leadership of Narendra Modi, this traditional ethos has been translated into modern environmental governance. Over the past decade, India's environmental governance has undergone a significant transformation. The budget allocation for the Ministry was around ₹2,430 crore in 2012–13, which has increased to about ₹3,759 crore in the current financial year. This change reflects not only an increase in financial resources but also a shift in policy approach. The Government believes environmental protection and economic development are not conflicting objectives; rather, they are complementary pillars of a sustainable and developed India. Our traditional wisdom also reminds us that forests sustain human life and that protecting forests ultimately protects us.

I believe forests sustain life, and when we protect them, they protect us. In recent years, India has taken significant steps in forest conservation. The number of Ramsar Wetland sites has increased from 26 in 2014 to 98 today, and cities like Indore and Udaipur have been recognised as the first Ramsar Wetland cities in the country. According to the latest assessment, forests and tree cover now make up over 25 percent of India's geographical area. Wildlife conservation has also shown remarkable success, with the Bengal tiger population rising to 3,682, nearly three-fourths of the world's wild tigers. I would like to highlight the urgent need to protect urban forests as India is rapidly urbanising. Urban forests help reduce heat, improve air quality, conserve biodiversity, and maintain ecological balance. While initiatives like the Nagar Van Yojana are positive, I suggest establishing a National Urban Forest Conservation and Management Authority to ensure scientific management and long-term protection of urban forests. India has made progress in addressing air pollution through expanded monitoring systems and the National Clean Air Programme. Our climate actions, including reducing emission intensity and expanding renewable energy, show that economic growth and environmental responsibility can go together. I believe initiatives like the Green Credit Programme are encouraging greater environmental responsibility. Maharashtra has effectively implemented the National Clean Air Programme and restored degraded forests using CAMPA funds, while also increasing mangrove cover. Urban conservation projects like the Sanjay Gandhi National Park buffer, Navi Mumbai mangroves, and the Gorewada biodiversity project have become national models. I believe environmental protection is both a moral and constitutional duty, and as India moves toward Viksit Bharat 2047, development must go hand in hand with ecological sustainability.

SHRI MASTHAN RAO YADAV BEEDHA: I believe environmental protection is a collective responsibility. In recent years, India has shown that economic growth and environmental responsibility can go together. The increased budget allocation for the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change and higher funding for environmental programmes reflect the Government's strong commitment. India has also reduced its emission intensity and expanded renewable energy capacity, while continuing wildlife conservation through initiatives like Project Tiger and Project Elephant. These efforts show that environmental protection is a key part of India's

development. I believe air pollution remains a major environmental challenge, especially in urban areas, and requires stronger action through better infrastructure and technology-based monitoring. Supporting forest communities through sustainable livelihoods like forest produce and eco-tourism can promote both conservation and rural development. I believe India has made important progress in environmental governance under the leadership of Prime Minister and Environment Minister and must continue strengthening conservation and climate commitments.

SHRI MADAN RATHORE: I would like to draw the Minister's attention to a serious problem in Rajasthan. The polluted water from factories and towns around the Harike Barrage in Punjab flows into the Harike Barrage through the Sutlej River and from there reaches Rajasthan via canals. This water, through the Rajasthan Feeder and Ferozepur Feeder, supplies districts including Sri Ganganagar and Bikaner, adversely affecting public health and the environment. Despite repeated warnings from the Pollution Control Board, the Punjab government has not taken effective action. Therefore, I request the Minister to take strict measures to resolve this issue and compel the Punjab government to stop releasing polluted water. I would like to offer some important environmental suggestions. First, the tree named Conocarpus grows very rapidly and releases carbon dioxide both day and night, so it needs to be controlled. Second, to increase groundwater levels, water from bathrooms and drains should be recycled into the soil. Third, to prevent plastic pollution and make use of waste, industries focused on recycling and reuse should be promoted. Fourth, noise pollution requires awareness and training. Additionally, industries should install effluent treatment plants, and water should be sent via pipelines to refineries or for reuse. Finally, serious attention and control are needed for air pollution to ensure the safety of health and the environment. I would like to offer some important suggestions for environmental protection. During road construction and widening, it is essential to properly replant the trees that are cut, install tree guards, and ensure their maintenance and monitoring. In addition, harmful and invasive species like Juliflora should be removed, as they prevent other vegetation from growing and affect grazing and land use. To increase groundwater levels, water should be recycled into the soil and storage should be enhanced. Furthermore, air pollution, including nitrogen dioxide, sulfur dioxide, and PM particles, poses a serious threat to human health and the environment, so special attention must be given to its prevention and control. In all these efforts, responsibility lies not only with the government but also with ordinary citizens.

DR. M. DHANAPAL: I believe this Ministry is crucial for protecting India's natural heritage while promoting sustainable development. I see forest and biodiversity conservation as a priority through initiatives like the Green India Mission, National Afforestation Programme, and CAMPA, which restore degraded land, expand tree cover, and support forest-dependent communities. Wildlife protection through programs like Project Tiger and Project Elephant is equally important to maintain ecological balance. Air pollution remains a major challenge, worsened by urbanization, industry, vehicles, and biomass burning. Delhi and the NCR face severe pollution, requiring urgent, coordinated action by the Ministry, Delhi Government, and neighbouring States to strengthen pollution control and monitoring systems.

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