

RAJYA SABHA

***SYNOPSIS OF DEBATE**

(Proceedings other than Questions and Answers)

Tuesday, March 16, 2021 / Phalguna 25, 1942 (Saka)

REFERENCE BY THE CHAIR

MR. CHAIRMAN: Hon. Members, as you might be aware, our country has embarked upon an ambitious endeavour on the issue of Tuberculosis, to end Tuberculosis in the country by 2025, five years ahead of the global Sustainable Development Goals Target of 2030. The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, has already taken several initiatives for combating TB, like improving the reach and quality of diagnostic services, introduction of all-oral regimen, introduction of newer drugs, financial support for nutrition, extensive multi-sectoral and private sector engagement, among other such initiatives. The TB control is also gaining momentum in rural areas with the availability of rapid molecular diagnostics at the block levels for accurate and decentralized detection of TB. Active Case Finding Campaigns of house-to-house search for TB cases among mapped vulnerable populations has helped bridge the gap of 'missing million' and TB services have been expanded through Ayushman Bharat and Wellness Centres. The Ministry has also called for a Jan Andolan on TB, aimed at mass awareness generation and successive behavior change of the community. Hon. Members, we have adequate diagnostic and medical supplies, but what is of utmost

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importance is timely diagnosis and disciplined drug administration for which mass awareness plays a major role. As Members of Parliament, as representatives of the people, we have a larger role cut out for ourselves, towards the people we serve. It is our duty to work collaboratively with and through communities, to bring about much needed behavior changes and provision of more patient-friendly services. I urge the Members to extend cooperation and support TB control efforts in your respective States and serve as catalysts of change in building and strengthening supportive systems in the fight against TB, to eradicate it from our country by 2025.

MATTERS RAISED WITH THE PERMISSION OF THE CHAIR

1. Need for widening the Ghat Road on NH-49 in Mayurbhanj District, Odisha

SHRIMATI MAMATA MOHANTA: A 10-kilometer Ghat road on National Highway-49 going from Singra in Mayurbhanj district of Odisha to Mumbai via Bahragowda is very narrow and accidents occur every day here. Many vehicles run on it and there is loss of life. So, this two-lane Ghat road should be made four-lane by giving environmental clearance to it.

2. Need to give Marathi language the status of Classical language

***DR. BHAGWAT KARAD:** On the occasion of 'Matrihasha Diwas', Hon'ble Vice-President of India has urged that we should promote our mother tongue and use it optimally in daily life. Today everybody needs to promote one's mother tongue and culture related to it and publicise it. I urge the central government that Marathi language may be recognised as a classical language as it

* Spoke in Marathi.

fulfils all the conditions necessary being accorded status of classical language.

(Shri Narhari Amin, Shri Syed Zafar Islam, Shri Harnath Singh Yadav and Shri Jyotiraditya M. Scindia associated.)

3. Situation arising out of ongoing strike of bank employees

THE LEADER OF OPPOSITION (SHRI MALLIKARJUN KHARGE): Lakhs of employees belonging to the bank unions have been on strike for two days, due to which the functioning of banks has come to a standstill. The Government is taking a decision to privatize banks without asking 75 crore stakeholders. Employees are very concerned about their future due to the wrong policies of the government and due to indiscriminate privatization and ineffective merger. I will especially say that to solve the problem of those who are on strike, the Finance Minister herself should give a statement.

(Several hon'ble Members associated.)

4. Need for solutions to prevent food wastage

SHRI RAM NATH THAKUR: According to the latest food wastage index report, fifty kilograms per person per day, i.e. 70 million tons of grains per year is being wasted. Starvation also exists in this country, so there is a need for creating awareness in schools, general public in order to preserve food grains. I request that godowns may be built for storage and food grains may be preserved, so that there is no starvation in the country.

(Several hon'ble Members associated.)

5. Issue of Myanmar Refugees in the North-Eastern States

SHRI K. VANLALVENA: More than 300 refugees have entered Mizoram and about 150 refugees are Myanmar police personnel. The Ministry of Home Affairs has given direction not to entertain Myanmar refugees. Sending them back to Myanmar would mean killing them. Being the biggest democratic country in the world, we must encourage any citizens who make effort for the establishment

of democratic right and principle. I request the Ministry of Home Affairs to change the policy regarding Myanmar refugees to some extent.

(Several hon'ble Members associated.)

6. Delay in Establishment of Refinery at Lohgara Prayagraj District, U.P.

SHRI REWATI RAMAN SINGH: Land has been kept acquired for the past few years for the refinery at Lohgara in Shankargarh, Prayagraj, but the said refinery at Lohgara is yet to be established. If the refinery is not to be set up there, I urge you that the land kept acquired for many years should be returned to the respective farmers.

(Several hon'ble Members associated.)

7. Need to Constitute Enquiry Committee and Social Audit into the Distribution of Food Grains from the Central Pool to the States during the Lockdown Period

SHRI M. SHANMUGAM: During the Corona lockdown period, the Central Government have made available additional food grains under the provision of National Food Security Act and Prime Minister Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana. However, it has not been properly distributed in various States. Foodgrains were diverted to rice mills and for trading, involving irregularities and corruption in the distribution of foodgrains. It is requested that the Central Government may institute an enquiry committee to go into the whole matter and ensure proper distribution of foodgrains to the States and the central pool. There should a social audit on foodgrains supplied under the NFS scheme.

(Several hon'ble Members associated.)

8. Slow Speed of Corona Vaccination in Country

SHRI SHAKTISINH GOHIL: Corona cases have been increasing for the past few days. However, only 0.35 percent have received the second dose in the ongoing vaccination. At this pace, it

will take 12 years 6 months to vaccinate 70 percent of the population and 18 years for the entire population. Therefore, I request the government to speed up the pace of vaccination and make arrangements to give vaccines to everyone as soon as possible.

(Several hon'ble Members associated.)

9. Need for Extra Attempt for Candidates in Civil Services Examination, 2021 due to COVID Situation

SHRI SANJAY SINGH: Many UPSC candidates could not take the exam due to Corona epidemic and this was their last chance due to age limit. The reason for not taking this exam is not their ability or their preparation, but it is epidemic. There is no fault of those students in this. It is requested that the government should think about them seriously and sympathetically and they should be given additional opportunity so that their future may not get spoiled.

(Several hon'ble Members associated.)

10. Need to Release of a Postal Stamp in the Honour of Raja Bahadur Venkata Rama Reddy, on the Occasion of his 150th Birthday Celebrations

SHRI K.R. SURESH REDDY: As the States of Andhra Pradesh & Telangana and the rest of the country gear up to celebrate the 150th birthday celebrations of Raja Bahadur Venkata Rama Reddy, I request the Government of India to release a postal stamp in his honour. You may be well aware of Raja Bahadur's contribution, especially in the field of girls' education. Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, the programme which was started by the Government of India, was initiated by Raja Bahadur Venkata Rama Reddy almost 80-85 years ago. So, keeping this in mind, it would be very appropriate if the Government of India honours this great soul of our country. He has been honoured internationally as well.

(Several hon'ble Members associated.)

11. Need for Development of Kapil Vastu, the Birth Place of Lord Buddha

SHRI BRIJLAL KHABRI: I want to draw the attention of the Government towards development of Kapil Vastu which is situated in Siddharth Nagar. This place is known as the birthplace of Lord Buddha. Siddharth Nagar is the most underdeveloped district along Indo-Nepal border. If this district is developed, then it will create sources of livelihood for the people there. People from across the country visit this place but there is no proper arrangement of staying here. Development of this place will attract tourists and it will also lead to all-round progress of the people there.

(Several hon'ble Members associated.)

12. Need for Setting up of More Courts for Fast Track Trial of Offences against Women and Children

SHRI PRASANNA ACHARYA: My submission is regarding the increasing incidences of rape and child sexual offences in our country. It is not that the Central Government and different State Governments are not taking any measures or any steps in this regard, but unfortunately, in spite of all the steps taken, these incidences of crime against women are increasing. There is a provision of setting up of Fast Track Courts in all the districts of the country to deal with such crimes. But, in many of the districts of the country, Fast Track Courts are yet to be set up. A sufficient number of Fast Track Courts should be set up under the POCSO Act so that speedy trials can take place and the guilty can be taken to task.

(Several hon'ble Members associated.)

13. Low Number of Seats for Forensic Science in Medical Colleges

SHRI SANJAY SETH: If a person dies in an accident due to unknown reasons, then a post-mortem is conducted to necessarily determine the cause of such deaths. Subsequently, the same post-mortem report becomes the basis of all police action and judicial proceedings in this regard. But, unfortunately, due to a shortage of forensic doctors the specialist doctors of other domains are making

such reports. It is ironic that a report which is so significant is being prepared in such a non-serious manner and there is possibility of errors in such reports. I want to request the Government to increase the seats of doctors in forensic science.

(Several hon'ble Members associated.)

14. Need to Include Caste-Based Socio-Economic Parameters in Census, 2021

PROF. MANOJ KUMAR JHA: I have asked about it in the House even in the past as to why caste-based census is not being conducted. It is appropriate that the census to be conducted in 2021 includes caste-based census so that we may get to know about the social background of hawkers, vegetable sellers, daily wagers, agricultural labourers, etc in different states of the country.

(Several hon'ble Members associated.)

SHRIMATI CHHAYA VERMA: The matter of caste-based census arises whenever the issue of census arises. Keeping that in view, the hon'ble Prime Minister had promised that his government will conduct caste-based census if they come to power. I urge the government to undertake caste-based census so that people of various castes may be able to get their rights.

(Shri Rajmani Patel, Dr. Banda Prakash, Shri Shamsher Singh Dullo, Dr. Sasmit Patra and Shri Bhaskar Rao Nekkanti associated.)

15. Need for Release of MPLADS Funds.

***SHRI B. LINGAIAH YADAV:** I have to raise the issue that MPLADS funds for the year 2019-20 have still not been released. On enquiry, I was told that the entire fund had been surrendered to the Finance Ministry. And this is not only my case but relates to the Members from both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha who have completed

* Spoke in Telugu.

their tenure. I demand for release of MPLAD Funds for 2020-21 and 2021-22, along with our pending dues of 2018-19 and 2019-20.

(Several hon'ble Members associated.)

THE MINISTER OF FINANCE AND THE MINISTER OF CORPORATE AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI NIRMALA SITHARAMAN) The hon'ble Minister, responding to the points raised by the members, said: Several MPs from various parties have represented on this matter. Regarding Lok Sabha MPs of 2019 -- who are continuing as Members -- whatever commitments have been made for the year 2019-20 will be honoured. However, for the year 2021-22, no new commitments on MPLADS will be entertained.

SPECIAL MENTIONS

1. Demand to Waive off Fees for Students of Kendriya Vidyalayas

DR. FAUZIA KHAN: In our Kendriya Vidyalayas, generally, children from lower middle-class families, along with children of Central Government employees and State Government employees get educated. In spite of this, the Kendriya Vidyalayas charge a fee of around Rs. 7,500 per annum. I urge the Government to waive off the fee in Kendriya Vidyalayas.

(Dr. Sasmit Patra and Shri Bhaskar Rao Nekkanti associated.)

2. Demand to Improve Safety and Security of Bank Lockers

SHRI MAHESH PODDAR: Some recent incidents of theft in banks and bank robbery have shaken the faith of the people of the country. Therefore, it is imperative that the safety of bank lockers is further strengthened and made technically more safe and sound. Besides, it is also desirable that the provision of insuring the assets lying with the bank should be put in place.

(Shri Sujeet Kumar, Dr. Sasmit Patra and Shri Bhaskar Rao Nekkanti associated.)

3. Demand to Provide Network Connectivity in 69 Panchayats under Rayagada District of Odisha

SHRI BHASKAR RAO NEKKANTI: Digital India is a flagship programme of the Government of India with a vision to transform India into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy. But, there is no network availability in 69 Panchayats under Rayagada District, Odisha till now. I request the Government to take suitable action in this regard.

(Shri Sujeet Kumar and Dr. Sasmit Patra associated.)

4. Demand to Include Tribes under Manjhi Tribe of Madhya Pradesh in the Scheduled Tribes List

SHRI KAILASH SONI: The Government of Madhya Pradesh has sent a communication to the Government of India to put various castes on par with Manjhi caste by including them in the schedule. I request the government to take action in this regard urgently.

(Shri Vishambhar Prasad Nishad, Dr. Sasmit Patra and Shri Bhaskar Rao Nekkanti associated.)

5. Need for Upgradation and Efficient Regulation of Jawaharlal Nehru Hospital under Bhilai Steel Plant, Chhattisgarh

MS. SAROJ PANDEY: Jawaharlal Nehru Hospital situated in Bhilai, Chhattisgarh was once known as a premiere medical institute. But it is regrettable that facilities in this hospital are constantly going down. To make matter worse, the retired employees have to visit other hospitals in other cities due to absence of medical facilities in the said institute which is not only a drag on their pocket but they also have to undertake long and tiring journeys for treatment. I urge the government to issue necessary instructions in this regard.

(Shrimati Chhaya Verma, Dr. Sasmit Patra and Shri Bhaskar Rao Nekkanti associated.)

6. Demand for Facility of Home Vaccination for Physically Challenged/Senior Citizens

SHRI ANIL DESAI: Amid apprehensions of a second wave of COVID pandemic, the government is undertaking vaccination on a large scale across the country and persons over 60 years of age and those with comorbidities are being inoculated free of cost. I want to suggest to the Government of India that a team of mobile health workers should be put in place to administer vaccine to the senior citizens at home.

(Dr. Fauzia Khan, Shri Rewati Raman Singh, Shri Bhaskar Rao Nekkanti and Dr. Sasmit Patra associated.)

7. Demand for Release of Due Share of GST Compensation to Chhattisgarh and Payment of Interest on Loans

SHRIMATI PHULO DEVI NETAM: The government has not paid the state share of taxes to Chhattisgarh nor has it paid GST compensation to the state. I, therefore, request the government to make payment of Chhattisgarh's dues without delay and also pay the interest for the loans the state has taken in the meantime.

(Dr. Fauzia Khan, Shri Bhaskar Rao Nekkanti and Dr. Sasmit Patra associated.)

8. Demand to Reduce Gap in Disability Pension of Servicemen on the basis of Rank

SHRI TIRUCHI SIVA: There is a wide disparity in the Defence disability pensions paid to the servicemen of the country. It is crucial to understand that rank has nothing to do with disability and therefore should not be the basis of lower or higher disability pension. I urge the Government to do the needful to reduce this gap in the disability pensions of servicemen on the basis of rank.

(Dr. Fauzia Khan, Shri Sujeet Kumar, Shri Bhaskar Rao Nekkanti and Dr. Sasmit Patra associated.)

9. Demand to Approve the Project of Rehabilitation and Rejuvenation of 21 Rivers in Maharashtra

SHRIMATI PRIYANKA CHATURVEDI: The proposal of Government of Maharashtra regarding rehabilitation and rejuvenation of 21 rivers in the State is still pending with NITI Aayog despite the fact that it was submitted long back in June 2019. Therefore, I urge the Government of India that the approval for the aforesaid project should be granted at the earliest.

(Dr. Fauzia Khan, Shri Bhaskar Rao Nekkanti and Dr. Sasmit Patra associated.)

DISCUSSION ON THE WORKING OF THE MINISTRY OF JAL SHAKTI -- Contd.

THE MINISTER OF JAL SHAKTI (SHRI GAJENDRA SINGH SHEKHAWAT), replying to the discussion, said: A total of 23 members participated in this discussion. I would like to thank all hon'ble members for that. Water is of utmost importance in the life of all of us. It is not possible to imagine the world without water. Human beings can survive for 15 days only on the basis of water without taking food. I am born in the Jaisalmer district at the western end of the country in the far west. I have seen my mothers and sisters walking miles and miles daily to fetch water. Water is definitely important. India has 18 percent of the total population of the world and in comparison, only four percent potable water is available. The whole world is feeling the challenge of water today and there is an even bigger challenge before India. We are the second largest population in the world. Jaisalmer receives only 100 millimeters of rain, while there are areas where it receives the highest rainfall in the world. We are feeling the climate change. There have been changes in the rainfall pattern here. The number of rainy days is decreasing. Water is definitely a matter of concern and it is a matter of great concern for India. One party remained in power for 55 years. If the then

government had looked at it with a farsightedness at that time, today the situation would have been different. Drinking water was considered in a separate Ministry, rural affairs were considered in a separate Ministry, the subject of urban development was considered in a separate ministry. The rivers of the country were discussed in the Ministry of Environment and Forests. Our visionary Prime Minister integrated all this. He combined all these together to create a Ministry, so that we can make this country water-rich. He started the process of making the movement of water a people-to-people movement. He sent a letter to 2.5 lakh public representatives living in different linguistic regions and urged them to think about making villages water rich in gram sabhas. Such water parliament was organized in 2 lakh villages. Revival of traditional water sources, water harvesting, water conservation were considered. Lack of water can have a negative effect on our GDP by up to six percent. It is estimated that by the year 2030, water requirement will be doubled and by 2050, the water requirement will be four times in comparison to today. In the 5 years between 2014 and 2019, he started various schemes to bring changes in the standard of living of ordinary human beings. He worked for providing 'home to the poor', 'toilet to the poor', 'gas stove to the poor', 'electricity to the poor's house'. Hon'ble Prime Minister declared 'Jal Jeevan Mission' on August 15, 2019, with the goal of making water accessible to every household. He set a target that by 2024, we will provide drinking water to every household. Water is a state subject, so we interacted with the states and held extensive consultations. We conducted regional workshops as per their circumstances and set guidelines for the same. In the last 70 years, as much households had been provided water, we have been successful in providing drinking water to more homes in comparison to that.

Today 52 districts of the country have become 100 percent drinking water districts, 80-85 thousand villages have become water rich villages. In 85 thousand villages, not a single woman has to go outside the house to fetch drinking water. More than one and a half million connections are being provided daily. For water quality, we have set up a water quality testing laboratory in each district of the country, a laboratory in every block and field testing kits given to five

women in every village so that they can check the water quality daily. A repository will be created in the country to study the changes in water quality in the coming times in the country and policies can be made accordingly. We organized a competition to develop sensor based technologies. We have urged many start ups of the country and the world working in this field to develop a sensor that can be installed in villages online and we can ensure water quality and quantity. Whether water is reaching or not up to the poor person's home, it will be assessed through that sensor. In the coming time, drinking water will reach every village in the country. We are going to touch the figure of 17 percent to 37 percent. When 20 percent progress has been made in the country, there has been only 3 percent progress in Bengal so far. This time my ministry has been given a grant of more than 60,000 crore rupees, out of which 50,011 crore rupees has been given only for drinking water. We are going to provide water to one lakh villages. There should be participation of MPs in 'Jal Jeevan Mission'. Today, projects of worth 1 lakh 91 thousand crores are on going and these projects are to be completed in the coming three years. We will review it every three months so that we can complete it at a more rapid pace with the cooperation of all. 'Swachh Bharat Mission' was started in the year 2014 and we have achieved 'Sanitation for all' in 2019. We have succeeded in bringing changes in the lives of 60 crores people of India, now we will work for complete sanitation. Today I can say with pride that more than a thousand villages have declared themselves ODF. The work that we are doing on the Ganga Mission has been discussed here. I do not want to go into too much detail. Ganga Action Plan-1 was started in 1985 and till 2014 only four thousand crores were spent. A Sewage Treatment Plant (STP) of 15 MLD was formed in the country for 15 years. We have achieved 15 times more capacity today. There has been a tremendous improvement in the quality of the Ganges river water. We have also worked for the uninterrupted water flow of the Ganges. We issued an e-flow notification so that aquatic organisms living in the Ganges ecosystem can also get their rights. The number of dolphins has now increased by hundreds of times. The number of Hilsa fish has increased by thousands of times. Even today, 65 percent of our

dependability is on ground water. In states like Punjab, where the maximum irrigation is done, depletion of groundwater is also the highest. About 20–22 percent of the country's blocks are either critically exploited or over-exploited. We have started working on the basis of heliborne technology. We will give Gujarat, Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh a heliborne survey report in a year through a heliborne survey of aquifers inside the land and over the surface topography to every Panchayat so that crores of rupees of the 15th Finance Commission and NREGA could be spent on this work. Yesterday, an hon'ble member was advising that work should be done on participatory watershed management of ground water. I want to tell that many states started this work. We have started a pilot project of Rs 6,000 crore in the name of 'Atal Ground Water Scheme'. We have started working on it in 78 districts of the seven states which are the most vulnerable. We have started working on the principle of Participatory Watershed Management over this. 18 crore 93 lakhs were received in 'Jal Jeevan Mission', from which we have given 3 crore 85 lakh new connections. We gave Rs 227 crore to the Punjab government in the year 2019-20, out of which the state spent only Rs 73 crore. We had allocated funds of Rs 208 crores to Chhattisgarh in the year 2019-20, out of which the state government has been able to spend only Rs 66 crores. The country made 20 percent progress while Chhattisgarh was able to make only five and a half percent progress. In Jharkhand 54 lakh households were to provide drinking water, only 7 lakh households could be provided drinking water. 291 crores was given out of which only 143 crores was spent. There is not a single house in Goa and Telangana where a woman has to go outside to fetch water to get drinking water. Out of the 87 lakh rural households in Gujarat, drinking water reaches up to 77 lakh households. Himachal Pradesh has coverage up to 13 lakh houses out of 17 lakh houses. Out of 31 lakh rural households in Haryana, coverage has reached up to 27 lakh houses. Out of 1 crore 83 lakh households in Bihar, drinking water has reached up to 1 crore 33 lakh households. We sent the money to the Punjab government's account but the Punjab government could not spend it. Projects worth 30 thousand crore rupees have either been completed or are underway. We brought a new model - the

hybrid annuity model. We created a long term irrigation fund in PMKSY. As a representative of Rajasthan, I felt very sad yesterday on two issues. Yesterday a decision was given on the Batla House Encounter. When this incident took place, our honorable Members were shedding tears. An honorable Member officially said here that I stopped the Sardar Sarovar dam from being built. I felt very bad to hear this. Surely my sisters of Rajasthan came to know that due to which they had to remain thirsty for so many years.

GOVERNMENT BILL

The Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Bill, 2020.

THE MINISTER OF HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE; THE MINISTER OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY AND THE MINISTER OF EARTH SCIENCES (DR. HARSH VARDHAN) moving the motion for consideration of the Bill, said: India was one of the first few countries in the world to legalize abortion. MTP Act was made on the recommendations of Shantilal Shah Committee in 1971. The Act decriminalizes the abortion-seeker, if performed under provisions of the Act, and it also offers protection to the medical practitioners, if again performed as per the provisions of the Act. A number of writ petitions have been filed in different Courts in India seeking permission for aborting pregnancies at gestational age beyond the present permissible limit on the grounds of fetal abnormalities or pregnancies due to sexual violence forced upon women. We held consultation process with experts as well as with the Law and Justice Ministry in this regard. This Bill will ensure safety and well-being of women and will enlarge the ambit and access of women to safe and legal abortion without compromising on safety and quality of care. There is a scope for increasing the upper gestational limit for terminating pregnancies including pregnancies with substantial foetal abnormalities which are detected late in the pregnancy. There is also a need for increasing access of women to legal and safe abortion service

in order to reduce maternal mortality and morbidity caused by unsafe abortions and its complications. Amendments to the MTP Act, 1971 are proposed with a view to increasing the upper gestation limit for termination of pregnancy and strengthening access to comprehensive abortion care under strict conditions, without compromising the service and quality of safe abortions. The MTP (Amendment) Bill, 2020 has a few salient features. Earlier there was the requirement of opinion of one Registered Medical Practitioner for termination of pregnancy up to 20 weeks of gestation. Then, it has the requirement of opinion of two Registered Medical Practitioners for termination of pregnancy of 20 to 24 weeks of gestation, for enhancing the upper gestation limit from 20 to 24 weeks for such categories of women as may be prescribed by rules in this behalf and then, non-applicability of provisions related to length of pregnancy in cases where the termination of pregnancy is necessitated by the diagnosis of any substantial fetal abnormalities diagnosed by the Medical Board. The Bill proposes to prescribe rules also under the Act on mainly two-three issues -- category of women who shall be eligible for an extended gestational period for termination of pregnancy of 20 to 24 weeks, also the norms for the Registered Medical Practitioner whose opinion is required for termination of pregnancy at different gestational ages and also the power and functions of the Medical Boards.

MOTION FOR REFERENCE OF BILL TO SELECT COMMITTEE

Shri Partap Singh Bajwa moved an amendment for reference of the Bill to the Select Committee of the Rajya Sabha.

DR. AMEE YAJNIK: The parent Act was brought in 1971. We welcome this Amendment Bill but there are some lacunas. I did not find you saying that several stakeholders or those who are directly affected by this Bill were heard. I urge you to send the Bill to a Select Committee. There are two words 'dignity' and 'justice for women' written in the Statement of Objects and Reasons. I will request you to

see that the Bill does not become one more Act because when these Acts become law they just spill into the legal arena and then they become devoid of sensitiveness, and that is where the woman is largely affected. A number of writ petitions had been filed seeking permission for abortion beyond the time-limit given by the parent Act. These girls or women are pregnant because they were rape victims or mentally challenged. They did not know for 20 weeks. These women had to go to Courts to knock the doors for justice. We are dealing with live material here. It is the woman and the foetus. There is an opinion that Woman should have the right to decide for herself. And then, there is another opinion that the State has to protect the foetus, the life, which is given by the Constitution by way of right to life. We need to have a balancing line because we are talking about life here. When we talk about giving dignity and justice to women, the Bill is a welcome step, but it does not give a proper complete solution. The Bill says that the twelve-week period, that is, gestation time limit, has been increased to twenty weeks. So, the woman, who had to go before twelve weeks or within that timeframe, now can go to the medical practitioner till twenty weeks. The second time slot is twenty weeks to twenty-four weeks. There, you need the opinion of two doctors. For the earlier time limit of twenty weeks, you need the opinion of one doctor. But, the main issue here is that apart from two doctors, if it is beyond twenty-four weeks, the pregnant woman or the girl has to go to a Medical Board and the Medical Board has to be manned by a gynecologist, an obstetrician, a radiologist and a pediatrician. Now, when we are talking about specialist doctors, we also need to look at our national health service. The second point is whether there should be a State intervention at this particular point of time when a woman is pregnant and she is worried about her own life, about the life of the foetus and, later on, about other aspects, because she lives in a society which considers these things as stigma. Earlier, a woman had to move the court and seek permission for termination of her pregnancy and the court had to intervene. So, again, if she has to go to the same court, then we are relegating women to legal arenas, which should not be the case at a time when she is pregnant. The National Health and Family Survey shows only 53 per cent of abortions were performed

by registered medical doctors. The rest were done by midwives etc. This speaks volumes about our medical professionals and their availability within our country. The National Health Profile of 2017 indicates that India has merely one million qualified doctors for a population of 1.3 billion people. And, this data about Community Health Centres from 2015 to 2019 shows a shortage of 81.89 per cent in specialist doctors. The Lancet Global Health Report, 2015 says that of 15.6 million abortions that occurred in India in 2015, 78 per cent were done outside health facilities. Another issue is about the medical board. We do not know as to whether that board will be manned by the specialist doctors. The tragic part is that no timeframe for taking decision by this medical board is provided in the Bill. If the Medical Board does not meet, if one of the doctors or members is not available, then, this medical board will take endless time to take the decision. But the woman cannot wait because she is beyond 24 weeks, it is a health hazard for her. There will be again a resort to going to court. So, this should be a simple and dignified procedure for women. We know that the community health centres are not manned by doctors. Even paramedics are not available to give services to the women who go to these centres. These women should not be left at the mercy of courts or boards. The Government should enable these women to take the opinion of the medical practitioners. As regards the formation of the medical boards, the Bill says that it will be provided in the rules. Two things will be provided in the Rules. Firstly, between 20 to 24 months, when the two doctors will give their opinion for certain categories of women, at that time, the definition will be mentioned in the rules but it is not given in the Bill. Though the Parliament has got the power to legislate on such issues, why should it be delegated to the Government for formation of rules? What will happen in case, in a remote area, a young girl is practically a victim of rape or sexual assault? A victim in the rural area is told that she has to go to the medical board after 24 weeks, but the rules have not provided for the formation of the medical board -- whether it is at the State level or the District level. These are the major issues. Lastly, there is an issue of privacy. The doctor or the medical practitioner should not disclose the name of the victim or the girl who

comes for termination of her pregnancy. If he discloses, then it will be punishable under the IPC. But, there is a whole doctrine of conflict of laws. When a minor, who is assaulted with some kind of sexual harassment and has ended up being pregnant, has to go to the doctor for termination of her pregnancy. Then, the doctor will have to inform the police that this is a case under POCSO because the person is a minor. If that is to be done, then you are disclosing the name as well as the contents of the particular matter, which is conflict of law. So, if the doctor divulges the name because of the POCSO requirement, he will be punishable with fine and imprisonment. If he does not, then he flouts this law. So, there has to be clarity. To legislate a law is easy. But to think about visualising what will happen on the ground, takes a lot of inputs from the stakeholders. In fact, the current Bill does not give the women the right to make important decisions regarding her own body and her own well being. The Bill also talks about specialist doctors, and to get all these specialist doctors in one place is difficult. When a pregnant woman is talking about her choice, she is talking about her reproductive rights. I do not find a single provision in the Bill which is imparting dignity and justice to women. So, I would urge the Government to send the Bill to a Select Committee.

¶DR. BHAGWAT KARAD: (Spoke in Marathi.)

DR. SANTANU SEN: The intent of this Bill is definitely appreciable as it recognizes the right of women and it gives woman to take her own decision towards the reproductive health. But this Bill does not say anything about the sex workers. Clause 5 (a) of this Bill violates the confidentiality and seeking necessary approval of Medical Board creates additional barrier. Urgent abortion training programme required to be taken by the Government. At the same time, an anesthetist and psychiatrist must be included in the Committee to be constituted. Fast Track Court should be set up immediately. Mandatory institutional delivery is very important. My

¶ Synopsis of speech delivered by hon'ble Member in Marathi will be published separately as supplement.

suggestion is that instead of two Registered Medical Practitioners, two specialist Gynaecologists should be included. I appreciate the intent of this Bill and suggest that it should be sent to a select committee so as to have further discussion with all the other stakeholders to give it a good shape.

SHRIMATI MAMATA MOHANTA, making his maiden speech, said: This Bill is the need of the hour for safe abortion of women. The purport of this Bill is to protect the health of women, safe abortion and reduce the complexity of her health. It takes care of the dignity and honour of women. It has been proposed to seek the opinion of one doctor for abortions up to 20 weeks of pregnancy and two doctors for abortions from 20 weeks to 24 weeks. Also, the woman's name and other information will be kept secret. There is a shortage of doctors, especially Gynaecologists, all over India. In rural areas, this shortfall is even more. Therefore, more and more doctors should be posted in rural areas and adequate medical and healthcare facilities should be provided at the panchayat level in the villages. Appropriate training should be imparted to the ASHA workers in rural areas so that they can create awareness among the girls and women in the village. I support of this Bill and request the Government to ensure maintaining the protocol during abortion procedure and strict action should be taken against those who violate it.

SHRI AYODHYA RAMI REDDY: This Bill, provides for an increase in the time period within which an abortion may be carried out. It proposes to require the opinion of one registered medical practitioner for termination of pregnancy up to 20 weeks of gestation and the opinion of two registered medical practitioners for termination of pregnancy of 20 to 24 weeks of gestation. It also proposes to enhance the gestation limit for special categories of women. It provides that the name and other particulars of a woman whose pregnancy has been terminated shall not be revealed. The Bill intends to positively impact a large section of population. Moreover, it will also help the rape victims, ill and under-age women to terminate the unwanted pregnancy lawfully. The Bill also allows unmarried women

to medically terminate pregnancies. However, we need to be vigilant of the issues relating to the preference for a male child and need to enforce the anti sex selection laws more effectively. Further, the Bill requires abortion to be performed only by doctors with specialisation in gynaecology or obstetrics. I, on behalf of my State, request the Central Government to support for setting up thirteen medical colleges in Andhra Pradesh to equalize the ratio of medical colleges vis-à-vis the constituencies. I also request the Government to send the Bill to a Select Committee for further review.

CH. SUKHRAM SINGH YADAV: In this Bill, the abortion limit has been increased from 20 weeks to 24 weeks, which is a good thing. In this, a provision has been made to take care of the circumstances behind conceiving of the woman, her age. Keeping in view all these social conditions, the decision needs to be taken. Until the medical board decides it, the right decision will not be taken. My request to the Government is that a medical board be constituted by amending this Bill and abortion be allowed only after the decision of the medical board, then only these women will get the right justice. The Government is also requested to refer this Bill to the Select Committee.

SHRI RAM CHANDRA PRASAD SINGH: I support this bill. Many times it happens for many reasons that the woman who has conceived, wants her termination. Termination should be done quite safely and medical services should reach their door step. It is a good law, a good initiative in that direction. I request everyone to support it.

DR. NARENDRA JADHAV: I wholeheartedly support this Bill. This Bill aims at increasing the upper limit for termination from 20 weeks to 24 weeks. It also aims at constitution of Medical Boards at the State level. It prevents a Registered Medical Practitioner from revealing the details and name of a woman seeking MTP, excluding the person authorized by law. Violation of this provision is being

made punishable. This is a commendable provision protecting women's right to privacy. This will also be helpful for women in difficult conditions to seek safe abortions.

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