

The House reassembled at two of the clock,

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN *in the Chair.*

STATEMENT BY MINISTER

Regarding Indians stranded in Iran due to COVID - 19 situation

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shri S. Jaishankar to make a statement on Indians stranded in Iran due to COVID-19 situation.

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI S. JAISHANKAR): Mr. Deputy Chairman, Sir, I rise to apprise this august House of some recent development pertaining to Indians stranded in Iran as result of the Coronavirus situation. The House is already aware of the efforts the Government had made to bring back Indians from Wuhan in China by mounting three flights to that city. Thereafter, we also brought back the crew and passengers of a cruise ship off Japan that was affected by Coronavirus. These evacuations also included some foreign nationals. Our focus since has shifted to Iran, in view of the sharp increase of Coronavirus in that country.

As per available information, there are over 6000 Indian nationals in various provinces of Iran. These include about 1100 pilgrims mainly from the Union Territories of Ladakh and Jammu and Kashmir and the State of Maharashtra; nearly 300 students primarily from the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir; about 1000 fishermen, including from Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Gujarat; and others who are on longer term stay in Iran for pursuing their livelihood and religious studies.

As the Government started receiving information about the spike in Coronavirus cases in Iran, as a precautionary measure, direct flights between India and Iran were temporarily suspended with effect from 27 February. Advisories were issued to avoid travel and returning passengers were started to be screened. This is an ongoing exercise.

Our Embassy in Tehran and Consulates in Bandar Abbas and Zahidan naturally reached out immediately to Indian nationals in Iran to ascertain their welfare. An advisory was issued asking our nationals to observe appropriate precautions. Emergency contact details of the Indian Mission were put out. Embassy and Consulate officials have been reassuring the Indian nationals and ensuring that they are in good health and had adequate provisions. I mention this as an overall approach but also with specific reference to the fishermen community whose welfare has been raised with me by a number of hon. Members.

Given the large number of Indians in Iran, it was natural that we should seek to prioritize their return, taking into account their location and exposure. The initial focus

[Shri S. Jaishankar]

is on visiting pilgrims. Many of them are in Qom, where Coronavirus incidence has been strong. The nature of their residency also increases the risks of exposure. Age is also a factor that was taken into account. As their welfare is being addressed, we are now focussing on Indian students. Many of them are studying medicine and are fully aware of the precautions to be taken in this difficult situation. The Embassy is in regular contact with them as a group. Our understanding is that the region where most fishermen are located has not been affected so severely. These factors will guide our approach in the coming days.

Over the last few days, the Government has been making focussed efforts for the safe return of the stranded Indians. Given the scale of COVID-19 infection and its pressure on Iran's own resources, a team of six Indian health officials has been deputed to Iran in order to setup testing and sampling facilities there. The first batch of 108 samples was received in India on 7 March. These were tested and 58 Indian pilgrims (25 men, 31 women and 2 children) , who tested negative, were repatriated in special IAF C-17 flight on 10th March. We have also received samples of 529 more Indians on this flight which are being tested in National Institute of Virology, Pune. We continue to collect more samples in Tehran and our endeavor is to ensure the earliest possible return of our nationals after appropriate testing and screening. We are working with the Iranian authorities to operate some limited commercial flights for facilitating early return of the remaining Indians after testing them. Our Embassy staff and the medical team are working round-the-clock under difficult conditions to ensure the objective of earliest possible return. The House will appreciate their operational constraints, given that there are restrictions that have been instituted for public health reasons in Iran. It is not easy to organize transport, accommodation and other logistics. The Iranian system is naturally stretched and we appreciate their cooperation in these circumstances.

During my recent visit to Srinagar, I took the initiative to meet parents of some of the students who are in Iran. Their anxiety at this time is completely understandable. I shared with them, in detail, the ground situation and sought their understanding. I assured them that the Government would facilitate the earliest possible return of their children. Our Consulate in Bandar Abbas is in touch with the Indian fishermen who are in southern provinces of Iran, including in cities of Asaalouyeh, Chiruyeh and Kish. Some of them have been visited and others would be soon. Provision of essential supplies to them is being ensured. As per available information, they are all in good health.

I would like to strongly emphasize that the Government remains fully committed towards the safety and welfare of our nationals in any part of the world. This has been the hallmark of our foreign policy. The House will surely appreciate the few other nations have done what we have with respect to COVID-19.

The global Coronavirus situation is being monitored on a continuous basis by a Group of Secretaries headed by Cabinet Secretary and a Group of Ministers, chaired by Minister of Health and Family Welfare. My Ministerial colleague has already apprised the House of measures being taken to control and contain the spread of virus in the country. Hon. Prime Minister himself has reviewed the situation from time to time. We have been regularly issuing travel advisories and visa guidelines that reflect the situation in countries of concern. E-visas and Visa on Arrival have been temporarily suspended in certain cases. Precautionary measures are also being taken on all our land borders as well as air and sea entry points.

The situation in Italy is now emerging as a cause of great concern. I would like to share with the hon. Members that steps in this regard have already been initiated. The challenge is growing by the day in Europe and we will have to respond accordingly.

I am confident that the hon. Members of this House would join me in commending the efforts of our medical team, the officials of the Indian Embassy and Consulate, the Indian Air Force crew and all those in India who are working tirelessly and selflessly to ensure that our people in Iran are safe and can return expeditiously. The Coronavirus challenge will require a focussed and sustained effort on our part and we will keep the House apprised of subsequent developments.

विपक्ष के नेता (श्री गुलाम नबी आज़ाद): सर, माननीय Foreign Affairs Minister साहब ने अभी जो वक्तव्य दिया, उसके लिए मैं उनका मशकूर हूँ। यह बहुत अच्छी बात है कि हमारे देश के लोग जो चाइना या दूसरे देशों में हैं, उन्हें वहां से भारत लाने का प्रयास किया जा रहा है और लाया भी गया है, इसकी तो हम सराहना करते हैं। महोदय, 12-13 दिन पहले जो Sunday था, उस दिन मैंने विदेश मंत्री जी को तकलीफ दी और इनका response बहुत अच्छा था, क्योंकि मैंने उस दिन इनसे कहा था कि कश्मीर से मुझे बहुत टेलिफोन्स आ रहे थे कि वहां के 800 से लेकर 1000 बच्चे ईरान की अलग-अलग universities में पढ़ते हैं और बहुत सारी संख्या में हमारे लोग वहां pilgrimage के लिए भी गए हैं, तो उन्हें वहां से लाने का बंदोबस्त होना चाहिए।

महोदय, उस समय माननीय Foreign Affairs Minister साहब ने यह बताया था कि ईरान में उनकी एयरपोर्ट पर टेस्टिंग की सुविधाएं नहीं हैं। इसलिए हमने WHO से बात की है और वहां से coordinate करके वे हमें अपने लोग यहां से वहां भेजने की अनुमति प्रदान करें, तो हम एयरपोर्ट पर टेस्टिंग शुरू करेंगे और तुरन्त अगले दिन से ही, यानी Monday से ही इस पर कार्रवाई शुरू हो जाएगी।

[شری گولام نبی آجڑاد]

سر، کل Foreign Affairs Minister ساہب کاشمیر گئے تھے۔ یہ بہت اچھی بات ہے، میں انہیں اس کے لیے بڑھائی دیتا ہوں۔ میں پوچھنا چاہتا ہوں کہ جو 1000 کے قریب بچے وہاں universities میں پڑھتے ہیں اور جو ہمارے لوگ وہاں pilgrimage کے لیے گئے ہیں، ان میں سے کتنے لوگ ابھی تک ہندوستان، یعنی اپنے ملک میں واپس لوٹے ہیں اور اگر نہیں لوٹے ہیں، تو کب تک وہ لوٹیں گے اور ان کا status کیا ہے؟

†قائد حزب اختلاف (جناب غلام نبی آزاد) : سر، مائٹے وزیر امور خارجہ صاحب نے ابھی جو بیان دیا، اس کے لئے میں ان کا مشکور ہوں۔ یہ بہت اچھی بات ہے کہ ہمارے دیش کے لوگ جو چائنا یا دوسرے دیشوں میں ہیں، انہیں وہاں سے بھارت لانے کی کوشش کی جا رہی ہے اور لایا بھی گیا ہے، اس کی تو ہم سراہنا کرتے ہیں۔ مہودے، بارہ تیرہ دن پہلے جو سنڈے تھا، اس دن میں نے ودیش منتری جی کو تکلیف دی اور ان کا ریسپونس بہت اچھا تھا، کیوں کہ میں نے اس دن ان سے کہا تھا کہ کشمیر سے مجھے بہت ٹیلی فون آرہے تھے کہ وہاں کے آٹھ سو سے لیکر ایک ہزار بچے ایران کی الگ الگ یونیورسٹیز میں پڑھتے ہیں اور بہت ساری تعداد میں ہمارے لوگ وہاں pilgrimage کے لئے بھی گئے، تو انہیں وہاں سے لانے کا بندوبست ہونا چاہئے۔

مہودے، اس وقت مائٹے وزیر امور خارجہ صاحب نے یہ بتایا تھا کہ ایران میں ان کی اینرپورٹ پر ٹیسٹنگ کی سہولتیں نہیں ہیں۔ اس لئے ہم نے ٹیلیو-ایچ۔او۔ سے بات کی ہے اور وہاں سے کو-آرٹینیٹ کر کے وہ ہمیں اپنے لوگ یہاں سے وہاں بھیجنے کی اجازت پر دیا کریں، تو ہم اینرپورٹ پر ٹیسٹنگ شروع کریں گے اور فوراً اگلے دن سے ہی، یعنی Monday سے ہی اس پر کارروائی شروع ہو جائے گی۔

سر، کل وزیر امور خارجہ صاحب کشمیر گئے تھے۔ یہ بہت اچھی بات ہے، میں انہیں اس کے لئے بڑھائی دیتا ہوں۔ میں پوچھنا چاہتا ہوں کہ جو ایک ہزار کے قریب بچے وہاں یونیورسٹیز میں پڑھتے ہیں اور جو ہمارے لوگ وہاں pilgrimage کے لئے گئے ہیں، ان میں سے کتنے لوگ ابھی تک ہندوستان، یعنی اپنے دیش میں واپس لوٹے ہیں اور اگر نہیں لوٹے ہیں، تو کب تک وہ لوٹیں گے اور اب ان کا اسٹیٹس کیا ہے؟

†Transliteration in Urdu script.

SHRI VAIKO (Tamil Nadu): Mr. Deputy Chairman, Sir, I really congratulate our hon. External Affairs Minister. Actually, on this particular disturbing issue, steps have been taken on war-footing. It is my bounden duty to applaud the Government. I have only one question. Yesterday, I received news from Kanyakumari district that about 1,000 fishermen are stranded in Iran and the food and water is available there only for two-three days. After that, there is no guarantee of supply because they say that they can't do anything. This is a very serious matter. You please take up the issue with the concerned Government.

SHRI A.K. ANTONY (Kerala): Mr. Deputy Chairman, Sir, I also appreciate the Government as well as the hon. Minister personally for the steps that have already been taken. I hope you will take steps on war-footing to bring back all those people, including the fishermen from Kerala, to India at the earliest. Today, I received a phone call from Italy. More than 100 Indians are stranded at the Milan Airport for the last 24 hours. And, out of these hundred people, twenty-eight are from the State of Kerala. The Milan Airport is totally deserted. There is nobody else, except the Indians. Since they are not getting any food or any other required help, they are really panicked. And, their relatives here are also panicked. I would like to know what steps the Government is taking to bring them all back to India. Also, what steps are you taking to provide them food and other required relief? Among these people, there are one or two pregnant women too. What steps is the Government taking to help those pregnant women because they are almost on the brink of delivery?

SHRI DEREK O'BRIEN (West Bengal): Sir, last time, the Health Minister had made a statement on this subject. We all sat here and made suggestions from the Opposition. Today, on this serious subject, the External Affairs Minister has made a statement. We sat here as the Opposition and heard his statement and are giving suggestions. I have two suggestions to make here. Actually, it would be better if you pass these suggestions on to your colleague, the Health Minister, also. Though he is not here, yet fair enough. My first suggestion is not to create panic in any communication that we do. My second suggestion is to look at what some of the State Governments have done. In the last seven-eight days, while there have been disruptions in Parliament here, two things in the State of West Bengal worked very well. I want to share those things. One is that the Isolation Wards have been created in all the Government hospitals. That was done as a precautionary measure and that has worked very well. Now, the private hospitals have also adopted that. And, the second thing that we have done is with regard to mass campaign as to how much you have to wash your hands and how long it has

[Shri Derek O'Brien]

to go. The Chief Minister of West Bengal herself, sitting in her office, shot a video. That video has gone viral so that more and more people get to know what to do and what not to do. Thank you, Sir.

SHRI ELAMARAM KAREEM (Kerala): Sir, I do appreciate the steps taken by the Ministry of External Affairs. I also agree with the hon. colleague, Shri A. K. Antony, that hundreds of Keralites are blocked in Italy. Several Keralites are there at the airport. The air tickets issued are cancelled at the airport. A group of fishermen is also stranded there in Iran. It is mentioned in your statement. Moreover, several workers who have come on leave from Gulf countries are not in a position to return to their jobs. Our Chief Minister has requested the Government of India to intervene in the matter and make arrangements for their transportation. Thank you, Sir.

DR. BANDA PRAKASH (Telangana): Sir, first of all, I congratulate the hon. External Affairs Minister for taking immediate steps to bring back the people from Iran and other parts of the world. At the same time, I request him to please identify the students from different parts of the country who are studying in other countries which are affected by Coronavirus. Particularly, yesterday, there was a news that Kerala is also affected by Coronavirus. What is the status of the people who are studying and working in other countries? Particularly from Telangana, so many people are studying in China, Uzbekistan and other countries. They are doing medicine and other courses. Then, there are people who are working as labour in other countries. They are working in Arab countries, particularly, the United Arab Emirates and other countries. Please try to do something for those people. Once again, I would say that already, the Telangana Government has started screening the airports. I request that the Government of India should also supply the required equipments to all the State Governments. Thank you.

SHRI TIRUCHI SIVA (Tamil Nadu): Sir, we appreciate the hon. External Affairs Minister for the steps he has taken to help the Indian nationals abroad who are affected by Coronavirus in the areas where they are. Also, we appreciate him for the fact that if a case of any Indian national undergoing some suffering or grievance is brought to his knowledge, immediately, the Minister responds and the people are very happy about it. Even the steps mentioned in the statement are very much appreciated. As per the statement, we understand that after screening and testing of those people's samples, if they are found to be negative, they are brought back. But, till then, for those who are stranded there, especially the fishermen from Tamil Nadu, there is a lack of food,

water and basic amenities. So, please ensure through our Embassy that at least their basic needs are fulfilled and they are also safeguarded from the effect of Coronavirus. The Civil Aviation Minister is here. I had suggested this earlier and today also I am emphasizing that even visitors are not allowed to Parliament and the holy places have been advised not to entertain people. Where people commonly move are the travelling areas especially the aircrafts where foreign nationals or our own people come. So, I would suggest through the Civil Aviation Minister that he can instruct the airlines to give masks to all the passengers because it is not available in the market. Moreover, people are not so much interested in doing that. But if it is given compulsorily at the counter itself, everyone will be having that. That would help many of our people not to be affected by Coronavirus. Thank you.

श्री उपसभापति: रवि प्रकाश वर्मा जी।

श्री रवि प्रकाश वर्मा (उत्तर प्रदेश): सर, इस संदर्भ में सरकार के जो प्रयास चल रहे हैं, मैं उन पर धन्यवाद देना चाहता हूँ। मैं भारत-नेपाल सीमा से आता हूँ। वहाँ पर हमारा जो गौरीफंटा चैक पोस्ट है, जिससे धनगढ़ी से सीधे interaction होता है, वह *ad hoc* है, छप्परो में चल रहा है और उसका कोई structure नहीं है। साथ ही वहाँ जो लोग आते हैं, उनकी sampling करने और check करने में बहुत बड़ी दिक्कत है। District headquarter में जो medical assistance मिल रही है, वह almost 80 किलोमीटर दूर है। इसके लिए मैं समझता हूँ कि आपको बताने की जरूरत है कि इस सम्बन्ध में क्या करना है।

सर, मेरी एक और जिज्ञासा थी। हम सभी कल सुन रहे थे कि इंग्लैंड का कोई सांसद है, जिसने इस बात का दावा किया है कि चीन में जो जैविक युद्ध की तैयारी चल रही थी, यह वहाँ से leak हुआ है और फैला है। हम माननीय मंत्री जी से पूछना चाहते हैं कि अगर यह सच है, तो हमारी क्या तैयारी है?

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shri Jose K. Mani, please be brief in clarifications.

SHRI JOSE K. MANI (Kerala): Sir, I appreciate the steps taken by the Government of India. I just want to supplement some of the things. Antonyji has already addressed the House. You are talking about Iran now. As he said, there are thousands of Indian citizens, the majority from Kerala, stranded in Italy. Now the WhatsApp live has come from the airport. They have not given in advance any notice at all. They have taken the ticket. Now, the Ministry of Health has given an advice that they should be tested negative for Covid-19.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you, Maniji.

SHRI JOSE K. MANI: My question to the Government is, suppose an Indian citizen, who is abroad, wants to come to India, how can we say, 'Don't come to India'?

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Please be brief.

SHRI JOSE K. MANI: How can we say that? You should take the precautionary steps.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Shri Sushil Kumar Gupta.

श्री सुशील कुमार गुप्ता (राष्ट्रीय राजधानी क्षेत्र, दिल्ली): माननीय उपसभापति महोदय, माननीय स्वास्थ्य मंत्री जी से मिलने के बाद दिल्ली के मुख्य मंत्री, माननीय केजरीवाल जी माननीय प्रधान मंत्री जी से भी मिले और कोरोनावायरस के जो वर्तमान हालात हैं, उन पर चर्चा हुई, साथ ही दिल्ली सरकार की तरफ से इसे रोकने की जो कोशिश होनी चाहिए थी, वह भी हुई। मैं माननीय मंत्री जी से एक निवेदन करना चाहता हूँ, चूंकि अंतरराष्ट्रीय हवाई अड्डा दिल्ली के अंदर ही है और दिल्ली में ही सारी दुनिया से बहुत बड़ी संख्या में ट्रेवलर्स आते हैं, तो क्या माननीय मंत्री जी यह बताने की कृपा करेंगे कि जो संक्रमित देशों के नागरिक हैं, वे हिन्दुस्तान में न आएँ, दिल्ली एयरपोर्ट पर न उतरें, इसके लिए उनका visa restrain करने की क्या कोई प्रक्रिया हमने शुरू की है या नहीं की है?

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Dr. Amar Patnaik. Patnaikji, please be brief.

DR. AMAR PATNAIK (Odisha): Sir, I would like to refer to Paragraph 12 of the statement. It is written that the situation in Italy is now emerging as a cause of great concern and so in other countries in Europe. I was just wondering that the latest report says that about 90 countries in the world are currently affected and it is increasing. Our approach appears to be on a 'first-cum-first-served' kind of a basis. But if it is there, if too many centres are there, are we prepared to do the testing and evacuate nationals simultaneously? Has a plan been worked out?

Secondly, Paragraph No. 11, last line. The borders across Bihar and Nepal and Bengal and Bangladesh, I think, the land borders, are sometimes very porous. I want to know whether adequate steps have been taken. Thank you.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Shri Binoy Viswam.

SHRI BINOY VISWAM (Kerala): Sir, the whole House is in appreciation of the Government and the Minister. Sir, Corona has become a national calamity and...

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Please put your queries, Viswamji.

SHRI BINOY VISWAM: I have three questions.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: One query only because I have to finish it.

SHRI BINOY VISWAM: One question is regarding the workers from the Gulf countries. Many of them are now facing difficulties to go back. Please ensure that they will get their jobs once they get back there. Number two, the mask and sanitizers are not available anywhere now. The cost has become ten times higher.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you.

SHRI BINOY VISWAM: Sir, my request is that the Government should think seriously of providing free masks and free sanitizers to all the people ...*(Interruptions)*... because prevention is better than cure.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you. It will help if you give some new suggestions. It has already been given. Shrimati Viplove Thakur. ...*(Interruptions)*... No, no, please. Shrimati Viplove Thakur.

श्रीमती विप्लव ठाकुर (हिमाचल प्रदेश): माननीय उपसभापति जी, मैं सिर्फ यही कहना चाहती हूँ कि कोरोनावायरस के शरीर में इन्फेक्शन का समय दो हफ्ते बताया गया है, लेकिन अब इसके लिए चार हफ्ते का समय बताया जा रहा है। मैं माननीय मंत्री जी से कहना चाहूंगी कि जो लोग बाहर से आते हैं, उनको चार हफ्ते के लिए सुपरविज़न में रखना चाहिए, नहीं तो बाकी के लोगों पर इसका बहुत खराब असर पड़ सकता है, धन्यवाद।

श्री चुनीभाई कानजीभाई गोहेल (गुजरात): सर, मैं गुजरात से आता हूँ। हमारे यहां साउथ गुजरात के, वलसाड एरिया के 225 मछुआरे आज भी ईरान में हैं। वहां उनके लिए खाने-पीने की भी कोई व्यवस्था नहीं है, उनको ओपन प्लॉट में रखा गया है। दो दिन पहले स्वास्थ्य मंत्री जी से मैंने उनके लिए रिक्वेस्ट भी की थी और उन्होंने मुझे आश्वासन भी दिया था कि मैं इसके ऊपर विचार कर रहा हूँ। आज यहां हमारे विदेश मंत्रालय ने भी इसके संबंध में बातचीत की है, तो उनसे मेरी यही रिक्वेस्ट है और मैं उनसे अर्ज करता हूँ कि जो 225 मछुआरे ईरान में, उनको वापस लाने के साथ-साथ 200-300 अन्य मछुआरे जो पाकिस्तान की जेलों में हैं, उनको भी जल्दी से जल्दी भारत वापस लाया जाए। पाकिस्तान की जेलों में जो 10x10 के रूम्स होते हैं, उनमें 30-40 लोगों को भर देते हैं तो वहां कोरोनावायरस का खतरा बहुत तरह से पैदा होने वाला है।

मेरी सरकार से रिक्वेस्ट है कि उनको जल्दी से जल्दी वापस लिया जाए। धन्यवाद।

SHRIMATI VIJILA SATHYANANTH (Tamil Nadu): Sir, we appreciate all the concrete and elaborate arrangements which the Government of India and especially, the Ministry of External Affairs and our dynamic Minister, have made for the safe return

[Shrimati Vijila Sathyananth]

as well as for taking care of the Indians stranded elsewhere, especially in Italy and Iran. Referring to fishermen, as I had pointed out earlier, 700 fishermen are still stranded in the coast of Chiru, Asaalouyeh and Kish. They are running out of food and water and they are in good health. After their samples are tested and the tests are found negative, they may be immediately brought back to the country. I plead the Government to ensure safe return of the fishermen. Secondly, some pilgrims from Kanyakumari district of Tamil Nadu have gone to visit the Vatican, Italy. They are all there. We would like the Government to ensure an immediate and safe return of the pilgrims from Italy. That is a very important request from our side.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Mr. Minister, please.

SHRI S. JAISHANKAR: Thank you, Sir. Through you, first of all, let me express my appreciation to all the hon. Members for their understanding support on what is a national, and in fact, an international challenge.

Sir, I would very quickly respond to the points raised by various Members, beginning with the points raised by Shri Ghulam Nabi Azad. At the moment, 58 people have come back from Iran and since we have about 535 samples which came along with them, whoever tests negative would be put on the next slots of flights which come in. We have made efforts by increasing the number of medical personnel to test as many people as we can and as quickly as we can. Once we are through with the pilgrims, we would focus on the students because they are really in a very difficult position. Many Members have raised concerns about fishermen. The fishermen live in southern Iran and the Coronavirus incidence is not as strong in southern Iran as it is in cities like Qom and Tehran. But we are looking at the fishermen also. Our Consulate in Bandar Abbas is in touch with them. I am myself directly in touch with them as well. They pick up the phones and I am able to see what they are doing. I can assure all hon. Members that we would ensure that they don't have a problem with food, drinks or any other material they want at the moment. But people should also understand that this is a very difficult time in Iran. The Iranian system itself is struggling. So, I think I would reiterate the message which Shri Derek O'Brien made, which is, please don't panic. Today, our strategy is this. There are about 90 countries where there is incidence of Coronavirus. We have to focus. We have to prioritize. We have to look at very extreme situations. At the moment, after China and the Diamond Princess, Iran is an extreme situation and Italy is an extreme situation. There are others like Germany, France and Spain where

the cases have gone up. As of yesterday, we have suspended e-visas for those countries. So, our idea is to limit travel, but focus on those countries where the Coronavirus incidence is very strong. Mr. Vaiko raised the issue of fishermen. I would like to assure him that I would personally ensure that they don't have problems of food and water. Mr. Antony brought up the issue of people stranded in Italy and I think a number of other Members of Parliament also raised that issue. I would like to assure all hon. Members that we are very, very cognizant of this problem. The issue arose because as the Coronavirus is so strong in Italy, we wanted people boarding a flight to have a Covid-free certificate. Now, it has been difficult for people to get that in the Italian system because the Italian system is busy treating patients in Italy. So, we are hoping, by tomorrow, to fly in a medical team to Italy, just as we have flown into Iran. We will do the testing of those people and try and put them on very early flights thereafter.

I welcome the suggestion which Shri Derek O'Brien gave. I want to assure him that when I look at the House, everybody is my friend. But with regard to the isolation wards, cooperative effort is already under way and, I think, the Cabinet Secretary is coordinating with all the State Governments to ensure that every State Government hospital has an isolation ward wherever that is feasible.

Shri Kareem raised an issue of students from Kerala who are stuck in Italy. I would like to again assure you that Iran and Italy are the two focal points today of our activities.

I also want to tell Dr. Banda Prakash that students from Telangana are also very much on our radar. We are generally giving students a particular sort of priority because many of them are facing situation where the dormitories have been closed. So, they are having a much more difficult time than other people. We are very sensitive to that.

Shri Tiruchi Siva raised the issue of fishermen again in Iran. Please be assured, they are very much on the radar.

Regarding the check points which Shri Ravi Prakash Verma raised, I will take the details. Let me look at that because we are, on our land borders, trying to channel all movement through check points which have thermal screening because that is the best effort we can make. But, in this particular case, I will take the details from you.

[Shri S. Jaishankar]

Shri Jose Mani also raised the issue of Italy. I would like to inform him that actually the advisory that everybody from Italy should carry a CoVID-free certificate was issued about a week ago. Now, it is possible that many students and young people may not have seen that advisory. I understand the problem. We are trying to solve the problem. But I do want to tell you that it was not a last-minute imposition by us; quite a lot of notices were given.

Regarding the issue which Shri Sushil Kumar Gupta raised about airport management, I think the Group of Ministers will be looking at various measures. My colleague from the Civil Aviation is with me in that Group and we had a discussion on that today.

The larger issue that when you have so many countries and so many problems, how you will evacuate and test everybody, was raised by Dr. Amar Patnaik. The answer to that is that it is not our intention; if we have a world-wide activity, we are only adding to the panic. I think it is important that we focus on very specific points. Even in China, we basically did it in Wuhan; we didn't do it in other places in China; they didn't require it. Similarly, in Italy, we are focusing on one or two places. In Iran also, it is mainly Qom and Tehran. So, it is a very focussed intervention; it is not a general intervention.

I have noted the point which Shri Binoy Vismam made about the people in the Gulf. We will support them; we will make sure that all the Embassies are instructed that when these people go back, they don't have job difficulties.

On the issue of mask, I will pass on that issue to Shri Hardeep Singh Puri who is dealing with free mask issue, and the rest of it I will pass on to Dr. Harsh Vardhan.

On the point which Shrimati Viplove Thakur raised about extending the quarantine, again I will pass on that point to the Group of Ministers. Regarding what Shri Gohel raised about fishermen, I want to assure him that there are no food issues right now. But, again, I will continually monitor that.

Finally, I do want to tell Shrimati Vijila that we will ensure that even the fishermen from your State, who are there, their welfare will be personally supervised by us. Please be assured.
