

together and this Central Vista Secretariat will have space for 50,000 people working. It will be connected through an underground shuttle tunnel so that transportation is very easy. On these, Sir, as I said, we have still to take the final decision. We have a plan; we have a Master Plan, but as we are going ahead, पहले हवा फैलाई गई कि 27 हजार करोड़ रुपये खर्च होंगे, यह सब बंद हो जाएगा, डिस्लोकेशन हो जाएगी। Sir, nothing like that is going to happen. Each step will be taken with a time-line, with cost estimates, etc., and the next step, in a few days when we take the final decision, they will be put in the public domain and tendering will be done. लेकिन जो माननीय सदस्य ने पूछा, मैं उन्हें जानकारी देना चाहूंगा, क्योंकि along the Central Vista Avenue, these nine buildings will come, Central Secretariat Office complexes और उपराष्ट्रपति जी का रेजिडेंस and a new Prime Minister's residence and complexes.

1.00 P.M.

One will move on this side of the North Block, जहाँ पर 90 acres में hutments थीं, और दूसरा on the South Block side. All these decisions are being taken in an orderly manner. Construction will be completed in a time-bound manner.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Question Hour is over. The House stands adjourned till 2.00 p.m.

[Answers to Starred and Unstarred Questions (Both in English and Hindi) are available as Part-I to this Debate, published electronically on the Rajya Sabha website under the link https://rajyasabha.nic.in/business/floor_official_debate.aspx]

The House then adjourned for lunch at one of the clock.

The House reassembled after lunch at two of the clock,

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN *in the Chair.*

STATEMENT BY MINISTER

India's Vaccine Maitri Initiative

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Statement by the Minister. ...*(Interruptions)*...

SHRI SHAKTISINH GOHIL (Gujarat): Sir, I have a point of order.

श्री उपसभापति : आपको नियम पता होगा कि जब जो बिज़नेस होता है, उस पर ही प्वाइंट ऑफ ऑर्डर होता है।...(व्यवधान)...

SHRI SHAKTISINH GOHIL: Sir, this is related to Question Hour and this is the right time to raise it. ...(*Interruptions*)...

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Please, no. ...(*Interruptions*)... अभी माननीय मंत्री जी का बयान है। ...(**व्यवधान**)... Nothing is going on record. ...(*Interruptions*).. माननीय शक्तिसिंह गोहिल जी, nothing is going on record. ...(*Interruptions*)...

SHRI SHAKTISINH GOHIL: *

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI S. JAISHANKAR): Sir, I rise to apprise this august House of the progress we have made in taking forward the Vaccine Maitri Initiative. Before I share the details of the Initiative Itself, I seek the indulgence of the House to explain the thinking behind it.

Mr. Deputy Chairman, Sir, as Indians, we are all naturally internationalist by virtue of our culture, traditions, heritage and history. We have never seen a contradiction between this internationalism and the nationalism that was the driver of our Independence struggle and subsequent endeavours at nation building. Indeed, this experience of the freedom movement has even further reinforced our internationalism by creating a strong solidarity with other nations who similarly struggled for their freedom. In recent years, as democracy struck deeper roots, we have found our own cultural expressions and identities that define us in a diverse world. In fact, drawing from our heritage, we have become even stronger voices for international cooperation and solidarity. That, of course, is most in demand at times of global stress, such as the Covid pandemic.

Mr. Deputy Chairman, Sir, many of us may share these sentiments and beliefs. The challenge of policy-making is to give that a practical shape. In the case of our Government, Prime Minister Modi's vision has provided an over-arching framework to make our goodwill meaningful in terms of practical initiatives and activities. We already saw that in our humanitarian assistance and disaster responses, whether in Yemen and Nepal or Mozambique and Fiji. As a result, in the last few years, India has developed a reputation of being the first and reliable responder in the region. We saw

* Not recorded.

that too in critical negotiations of global importance like the Paris Agreement, where we had a key bridging role. Or indeed in the International Solar Alliance or the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure, two notable initiatives envisioned by the Prime Minister. When it came to Africa, we raised the level of our cooperation very substantially at the IAFS-3 Summit in 2015. Our projects, training and presence has today spread widely across that continent. From the Caribbean to the Pacific Islands, the message has been clear that the Prime Minister of India not only has the willingness to engage them personally, but to back that up with concrete development programmes. It is this outlook of human-centric global cooperation that is the driving force of Vaccine Maitri.

Even as the Covid pandemic was in full fury, there were already demands for our pharmaceutical and medical capabilities. If we could meet them, it was largely due to the extraordinary ramp up of our Covid-related capabilities with which the House is already familiar. We are all cognizant of the low fatality rates and the high recovery rates that resulted from the Prime Minister's leadership and the Government's focused efforts. But there was an external beneficial impact of our capabilities as well. India could meet the spiking requirements of hydroxychloroquine, paracetamol and other relevant drugs across the world. In fact, we supplied 150 nations with medicines, 82 of them as grants by India. As our own production of masks, PPEs and diagnostic kits grew, we made them available to other nations as well. This generous approach, so characteristic of our culture, was also extended to the Vande Bharat Mission. Starting from Wuhan, we brought back nationals of other countries while looking after our own.

The House would, therefore, appreciate that as we contemplated the prospect of vaccination against Covid-19, a similar approach was natural. Our domestic vaccination programme started in January, 2021, and within a few days, we also started assisting our immediate neighbours.

The basis for doing so was the assurance that hon. Prime Minister gave in his virtual address to the U.N. General Assembly in September, 2020. On that occasion, he declared that India's vaccine production and delivery capacity will be used to help all humanity in fighting this crisis. We also offered to enhance cold chain and storage capacities for the delivery of vaccines. This approach is not only in keeping with our age-old tradition of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, as I have noted earlier, it is also the contemporary outlook of this Government to utilize India's growing capacities for the benefit of humankind. As a prominent nation in an increasingly multi-polar world, the international community has greater expectations of us. We, in turn, are prepared to demonstrate our willingness to shoulder greater responsibilities.

From the very beginning, India has always believed that the pandemic threatens the entire humanity and that the rightful response would be a collective one. Accordingly, even as early as 15th March, 2020, hon. Prime Minister took the initiative to hold a meeting of SAARC Heads of Government to fashion a regional solution. An important outcome was the creation of the SAARC COVID-19 Fund that supported the early exchanges on this issue within the region. We then held workshops and training courses to strengthen capacities for handling vaccines and other aspects of public health and COVID-19 management. Most recently, that was followed up by a meeting of senior health officials of the region on 18th February 2021. They shared the outcome of their deliberations with hon. Prime Minister, who urged a special visa scheme for doctors and nurses, coordinating a regional air ambulance agreement, a platform for studying data on the effectiveness of vaccines and a network for technology-assisted epidemiology for preventing future pandemics.

Our efforts, of course, went well beyond the neighbourhood when it came to online training and capability building. The Ministry of External Affairs organized 14 e-ITEC courses in partnership with premier institutions like AIIMS and PGI Chandigarh. There was even an exclusive one conducted in Bangla for Bangladeshi professionals, and one by Armed Forces Medical Services for the military doctors in South-East Asia. These 14 courses had a total of 1,131 professional participants from 47 countries.

In planning and executing Vaccine Maitri, we are naturally guided by a determination to make a difference at a difficult moment for global society. Our reputation as the 'Pharmacy of the World' has been reinforced in that process; so indeed has the faith in 'Make in India'. But more than the vaccines themselves, our policies and conduct have emerged as a source of strength for the stressed and vulnerable nations of the world. They can see that there is, at least, one major nation that truly believes in making vaccines accessible and affordable to others in dire need. The House should be aware that the supply of vaccines abroad is based on the assessment of adequate availability at home. This is continuously monitored and takes into account the requirements of our domestic vaccination programme as it unfolds in different phases. An empowered Committee oversees this entire process. Quite appropriately, Vaccine Maitri began in the immediate neighbourhood, starting with the Maldives, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Myanmar, as also Mauritius and Seychelles. The extended neighbourhood followed thereafter, especially the Gulf. Supplying smaller and more vulnerable nations was then the logic of reaching out to regions from Africa to the CARICOM. There are also contracts that our producers have entered into with other nations, either bilaterally or through the

COVAX initiative. To date, we have supplied 'Made in India' vaccines to 72 nations across geographies.

Sir, the House should recognize the enormous feeling for India that our initiative has generated. Those sentiments have naturally been expressed by leaders and prominent personalities of many nations. But more than that, our Ambassadors feel every day the warmth of ordinary people across the world for India. In the truest sense, this has been people-centric diplomacy at work. The world sees not just the selfless outlook of India but also the quality of our products and capabilities. The Covid pandemic has been a test of fire for all of us. But I can confidently state that even in the midst of a global crisis, the Prime Minister's initiative of such deep friendship has raised India's standing and generated great international goodwill.

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Now, clarifications. Shri Jairam Ramesh.

SHRI JAIRAM RAMESH (Karnataka): Sir, I would like to refer to para 10 of the Minister's statement and I am sure that the hon. Minister, who is amongst the most learned and most erudite Ministers of this Government, recognizes that the roots of the post-2014 success in the foundations that we laid before 2014. I would like to mention only three aspect of it. We became 'Pharmacy of the World'. How? We had the Patents Act of 1970 that recognized only process patents and not product patents, and that led to an upsurge of Indian entrepreneurship in the pharmaceutical industry. Then, we had the Foreign Exchange Regulation Act (FERA) in 1973, which diluted the equity stakeholdings of the multi-national companies and allowed the Indian pharmaceutical companies to emerge. And, thirdly, huge investments in science and technology were made in research laboratories, public institutions, publicly funded institutions, across the country, which created enormous successes.

In the Covaxin, which has been developed by Bharat Biotech, people do not recognize that the crucial element of Covaxin which is the 'adjuvant', was developed at the Indian Institute of Chemical Technology in Hyderabad, which is a sixty-year old organization, again, publicly-funded. And, Bharat Biotech itself owes its origin to the Department of Biotechnology that was established in 1986 and the Technology Development Board that was established in 1996. So, while we pat ourselves at the back for being 'Pharmacy of the World' and for being a major vaccine manufacturer, let us recognize that there has been a lot of continuity in these policies and the foundations that have been laid in the past few decades has led to a situation where we can take legitimate pride in our achievements.

I wish that the hon. Minister, who knows this history very well as I do, will, at some point of time, recognize the continuity in this achievement. Thank you.

SHRI BINOY VISWAM (Kerala): Sir, I rise to appreciate the statement made by the hon. Minister. We appreciate that this great country of ours has helped the world by supplying vaccines to 72 countries across the globe.

As my colleague, Shri Jairam Ramesh rightly mentioned, India has become 'Pharmacy of the World' not in a matter of few days. It involved great efforts and the political ideas behind those efforts. I would like to remember late Shrimati Indira Gandhi and the role she played in making India the 'Pharmacy of the World'. Here, that ideology, that political wisdom of this great country needs a mention. I hope the Minister and the Government will take care of that point also.

Sir, before concluding, I would like to make one more point. Sir, charity has to begin at home. We help everybody outside the country. That is good but what about the poor in India, what about the migrant labourers and the rural poor of this country? When can we assure that this vaccine will reach them? I request the Government to ensure that those sections of the country, the downtrodden, the migrant labourers, the poor people, are also taken care of. Thank you.

SHRI ANAND SHARMA (Himachal Pradesh): Sir, while appreciating the initiative that India has taken, what is expected of our country by our partner nations is that in time of distress, in time of global pandemic, India would rise to the occasion. Therefore, we take note of the countries that have been reached, the bridges of friendship built and the trust generated because of this initiative. At the same time, we also know, as the hon. Minister has said, that we are taking care of adequate availability, as the Health Minister also mentioned yesterday, in our own country. But I would like to join the sentiments expressed in the House. It would be in order that we not only acknowledge and appreciate but also place on record the contribution of our institutions built over decades after independence, including the ICMR, the Indian Institute of Integrative Biology, the IIIM (Jammu) and the IICT, Hyderabad, as Shri Jairam Ramesh has mentioned. And the fact is that India became the pharmacy of the world in the 90s, to be acknowledged not only as the largest producer of generic medicine but also the office of the world. Not only that, we are by far the largest vaccine manufacturer. It is not only the Bharat Biotech -- I won't repeat what has been said -- but also the Serum Institute at Pune. If you look at the year of establishment, it was in the 60s. So, this House must appreciate the contribution of

the institutions, the Indian scientists, the Indian epidemiologists and the Indian vaccinologists. Thank you.

SHRI S. JAISHANKAR: Sir, you will recall the saying that success has many fathers. I am delighted to see today so many fathers claiming success. I take it actually as ..(*Interruptions*)..

SHRI JAIRAM RAMESH: We are claiming ..(*Interruptions*)..

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Please, Jairam Ramesh ji. ..(*Interruptions*).. It is not allowed. ..(*Interruptions*)..

SHRI S. JAISHANKAR: I take it as a statement that they really want to praise the Vaccine Maitri initiative, except they are going about it in a very roundabout way. So, it is done in good spirit. I take it once again as a very generous compliment to the Government's efforts from the other side. I also take it, Sir, as a great affirmation of the Make in India programme which this Government has pursued so strongly and with such great focus.

Regarding the hon. Member, Binoy Viswam ji's point about the downtrodden, I think, all of us know the enormous efforts that the Government has made in getting the vaccine prices down. We have by far the lowest vaccine prices in the world. And the fact is that for a lot of people, this vaccine is available. Finally, I also note the deep appreciation of Bharat Biotech and the Serum Institute. I faintly recall questions which were raised when Covaxin came into the market. Many people perhaps don't wish to remember it now, but I am proud to say I got vaccinated with Covaxin. So, I think, I made my statement that day. Thank you.

DISCUSSION ON THE WORKING OF THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: We shall now take up the Discussion on the Working of the Ministry of Railways. Shri Sujeet Kumar to raise the Discussion...(*Interruptions*)..

श्री संजय सिंह : सर...

श्री उपसभापति : सुजीत कुमार जी, आपकी बात ही रिकॉर्ड पर जाएगी। ...(*व्यवधान*)...