

the Indian State of West Bengal and Sikkim, and the first phase is expected to be completed by 2027. The Sevoke-Rangpo railway line is part of India's border strategy to enhance connectivity in the North Eastern Region. By linking Sikkim to the national railway network, the project will help integrate the region more closely with the rest of the country promoting national unity and security. The plan for extending the all important Sikkim rail link to Nathu La will only be a boon to all-weather connectivity. It will aid the Armed Forces with logistical support in the forward areas. Nathu La, a border area with Tibet, is not only a tourism attraction, at a height of more than 14,000 feet but also an avalanche-prone area. At present, road connectivity provides a comfortable travel experiences for tourists and the Forces but all of that depends on favourable weather. I urge upon the Government to take up completion of all phases of the Sevoke-Rangpo Rail line till Nathu La on priority basis as once completed, this rail line is expected to have a significant positive impact on the local economy. It will improve transportation efficiency, reduce travel time, and make Sikkim more accessible to tourists and businesses. This, in turn, will lead to increased economic activities and job-creation in the region. This will also aid our Armed Forces with better connectivity. Moreover, it will help integrate the hill people into the mainstream national life, providing full support to entrepreneurial spirit of the region. Thank you.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI GHANSHYAM TIWARI): Thank you, Mr. Lepcha. The following Members associated themselves with the Zero Hour mention made by the hon. Member, Shri Dorjee Tshering Lepcha: Shri Sujeet Kumar (Odisha), Dr. Sasmit Patra (Odisha), Shri Maharaja Sanajaoba Leishemba (Manipur), Shri Dhananjay Bhimrao Mahadik (Maharashtra), Shri Devendra Pratap Singh (Chhattisgarh) and Shri M. Mohamed Abdulla (Tamil Nadu).

Shri Sandeep Kumar Pathak, 'Demand to counter hostile Drone activity on the India-Pakistan Border'; not present. Shri Sujeet Kumar.

**Concern over exponential rise in Non-Communicable Diseases due to surge in the consumption of ultra-processed foods in India**

SHRI SUJEET KUMAR (Odisha): Sir, I wish to draw the attention of the House and the Government on an issue which has grave consequences for the public health of our country, particularly, of our children and youth. The issue pertains to the alarming rise in the consumption of ultra-packaged food, what we commonly call the junk food, such as cold drinks, frozen fast food, etc., which are high on salt, sugar, unhealthy fat, but offer minimum nutrition. The WHO Report of 2023 states that

India's spending on the ultra packaged foods skyrocketed from 900 million, roughly 6,000 crore based on the conversion rate then in 2006, to almost 38 billion in 2019, that is, roughly 3 lakh crore, which is more than 40-times increase in the consumption of fast food in a period of 13 years.

Sir, we all know that excessive consumption of junk food, when combined with poor lifestyle, is one of the key reasons for the alarming increase in the Non-Communicable Diseases, NCDs, in our country such as diabetes, obesity, cancer, respiratory, cardiac diseases, and even long-term psychological disorders. Sir, there is an ICMR Report of 2022. The Report is titled, "India : Health of the Nation's States", which shows that NCD-related deaths in India rose from 37.9 per cent in 1990 to 61.8 per cent in 2016. This is the scenario that we are talking about. The most worrisome part is that, increasingly, the children are getting addicted to junk food because advertisements target the children and their impressionable minds. And, 41 per cent of our population is under 18, what we call children. So, Sir, you can imagine the health time-bomb that we are staring at! The national assets of ours, what we call demographic-dividend, can become a real danger to the nation. Our children will end up growing as unhealthy citizens.

Sir, the second worrisome aspect is that the same companies, the same brands, which sell better quality ingredients and food products in Western countries, particularly, US and Europe, sell cheaper versions of those brands in India, which has huge consequences for our citizens' health. They prioritize profit over the health of Indian citizens, taking advantage of our regulatory loopholes. Sir, we cannot stop anyone from buying anything. At the end of the day, it is the consumer's choice, but, at least, they should make an informed-choice, and the Government should take enough measures to strengthen the regulations. So, Sir, I will offer, through you, four suggestions, and urge the Government to take action. First, stricter FSSAI Regulation by amending the FSSAI Act of 2006. Second is, to consider the health tax on the junk food, the ultra packaged food. And third is, to adopt mandatory front-of-pack labelling.

Sir, if you compare two chocolates, one you buy in Geneva and one you buy in Delhi, you can clearly see how the font size is smaller of the ingredients... (*Time-bell rings*)...

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI GHANSHYAM TIWARI): Thank you Sujeet Kumarji. The following Members associated themselves with the Zero Hour mention made by the hon. Member, Shri Sujeet Kumar: Shri Amar Pal Maurya (Uttar Pradesh), Shri Jose K. Mani (Kerala), Shri Sandosh Kumar P (Kerala), Shrimati Indu Bala Goswami

(Himachal Pradesh), Shri Subhash Barala (Haryana), Shrimati Ramilaben Becharbhai Bara (Gujarat), Shri Maharaja Sanajaoba Leishemba (Manipur), Shri Sanjeev Arora (Punjab), Dr. Medha Vishram Kulkarni (Maharashtra), Shri Ram Chander Jangra (Haryana), Shri Neeraj Shekhar (Uttar Pradesh), Shrimati Sumitra Balmik (Madhya Pradesh), Shri Dhananjay Bhimrao Mahadik (Maharashtra), Dr. Kalpana Saini (Uttarakhand), Shri Deepak Prakash (Jharkhand), Shri Brij Lal (Uttar Pradesh), Dr. Sumer Singh Solanki (Madhya Pradesh), Dr. John Brittas (Kerala), Shrimati S. Phangnon Konyak (Nagaland), Dr. Fauzia Khan (Maharashtra), Dr. Sasmit Patra (Odisha) and Shri M. Mohamed Abdulla (Tamil Nadu).

Shri Santosh Kumar P. “Need to initiate comprehensive policies for the welfare of Indian Expatriates in GCC countries.”

### **Need to initiate comprehensive policies for the welfare of Indian Expatriates in the GCC Countries**

SHRI SANDOSH KUMAR P (Kerala): Sir, the Gulf Cooperative Council, GCC, consists of six countries in the Middle East, and we have a very huge Indian population living in these countries; 93,72,076 is the exact number as per the answer furnished in this august house in December last year.

Sir, there is urgent need for a comprehensive and pragmatic policy for the *pravasi* community who are contributing immensely to strengthen the Indian economy. Out of these, 27 per cent are from Kerala. There are a lot of issues and concerns related to this *pravasi* community and I would like to point out some of the major issues. The first issue is related to the air fare. The hike in air fare, especially during the peak season, has become a menace to the *pravasi* community. This has become a source of exploitation for the aviation companies. Unfortunately, our Aviation Ministry has become a mute spectator to this exploitation. This issue has been raised quite a number of times in this august House and other forums, but we are nowhere near a solution. So, I take this opportunity to urge the Government, through you, Sir, to take necessary steps to control the air fare. Secondly, when a person dies in one of the GCC countries, the mortal remains must be taken back to the homeland. For that, Air India is charging double the fare that Air Arabia charges. For example, Air Arabia charges 1,910 Dinars whereas Air India charges double that amount. Thirdly, the ICWF, the Indian Community Welfare Fund, is a huge amount that is with the Indian embassies in the GCC countries, being collected in various forms. The embassies are flooded with funds, but it is unused and of no use.