

Intervention on '*Overcoming the Pandemic Today and Building a Better Tomorrow: The Role of Parliaments*', at the virtual meeting of Third Standing Committee on Democracy and Human Rights held on 28 April 2021.

Hon'ble Chairperson, and Distinguished Delegates:

Overcoming the pandemic and building a better tomorrow is a twin and overlapping path that the world needs to traverse at the same time. Being pivotal stakeholders, parliaments have crucially important role to play in the fight against this pandemic.

Legislatures across the world have been facing lot of problems in discharging its mandated responsibilities. As challenges give way to opportunities, newer ways have been adapted by many legislatures to handle the emergency crisis and discharge the entrusted responsibility. From physical to virtual has been a preferred mode of transacting various businesses of the legislatures.

The Indian Parliament too has performed its core legislative, oversight and representative duties amidst the threat of pandemic. The Fifth Session of the current Lok Sabha was conducted smoothly amidst appropriate COVID-19 protocols. It recorded 114 per cent productivity and passed several key legislations including the Finance Bill and Appropriation Bill.

Keeping in view the emergency health crisis due to the Pandemic, the Annual Budget 2021-22 has given a big thrust on health expenditure which witnessed a

growth of 137 per cent over the previous year. Allocation of 35,000 crores of Rupees has been earmarked for vaccination alone. The Indian Parliament is supplementing the efforts of Government in combating the pandemic. The all encompassing *AtmaNirbhar Package* seeks to pull the country out of corona virus crisis by making every single individual safe and self reliant. Under the *Vaccine Maitri* initiative, India has supplied more than 66 million doses of Made-in-India Covid-19 vaccines to more than 90 countries around the world, including nearly 20 million doses to 47 countries under the COVAX facility.

Further, to deal with the second wave of the pandemic, many decisions has been taken on fast track basis like opening Covid-19 vaccination to every person above the age of 18 years, running of Oxygen Express train' by Indian Railways for transportation of liquid medical oxygen, adding up new beds in the Covid care centres, etc.

The Pandemic has impacted nations, economies, health infrastructure, and the life of the people across the continents beyond all projection. It has taught all of us a great lesson to put our efforts together and to work hand in hand to overcome this crisis. It is imperative for nations to forge global alliance to fight this Pandemic.

Mr. Chairperson, we had a constructive discussion in *Lok Sabha* on 'COVID-19 Pandemic in the Country' during the Monsoon Session, 2020. The discussion expressed several emergent concerns and came up with constructive suggestions.

To acquaint us further with all the nitty-gritty of the pandemic and add to our efforts to help people better, the parliament's Research Information and Library Service is dedicatedly providing us crucial information on real time basis.

Our Parliamentary Committees are constantly over viewing the management of the pandemic. These are providing valuable insights to the Government by assessing the prevalent situations. Just to share, the report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs on '*Management of COVID-19 Pandemic and Related Issues*' reflected on aspects of preparedness, health funding, vaccines, food distribution, data collection, malpractices, social and economic impact and also impact on education. Similarly, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Health and Family Welfare through its report '*The Outbreak of the Pandemic COVID-19 and Its Management*' highlighted issues relating to health sector.

Friends, it is worth mentioning that a COVID-19 Control Room is set up in the Lok Sabha to co-ordinate the efforts of Members of Parliament and members of State Legislative Assemblies to control the Covid-19 pandemic. Since the onset of pandemic in the country, our Hon'ble Speaker, Shri Om Birlaji, is in constant touch with the Presiding Officers of the State Legislative Assemblies through virtual platforms. Recently too, on 19 April 2021, Hon'ble Speaker had a virtual Meeting with the Presiding Officers of the State Legislatures and other leaders to take a stock of prevailing COVID-19 situation and discuss the role and responsibility of

public representative in the direction.

His holistic guidance has substantially strengthened our overall fight against COVID-19. By generating awareness, working with the local administration and grass root representatives, we, Members of Parliament, are successful in taking COVID specific initiatives to the last person in our respective constituencies. We are constantly responding to the people and explaining to them the importance of pandemic appropriate behaviour, ways of post-COVID care and proposed path to a prosperous world after COVID.

Everyone present here will agree that sustainable development is the only mantra for a better tomorrow. We all should, therefore, pool in our efforts for realizing the SDGs. This apart, to cement a strong foundation for universal health of mankind it is also necessary for us to change our ways of living.

Friends, the long practiced traditional Indian way of living has proved effective to deal with a pandemic like the present one. It has an in-built culture that promotes social distancing, personal and home hygiene and ecological balance as well. More importantly, it emphasizes on a disciplined routine which is in consonance with the natural laws. Let me point that daily routine of Indians is inspired with *Yoga*, *Asana*, *Pranayama*, immunity boosting food habits, *Ayurveda* and other traditional system of medicine. It is precisely for these reasons that the WHO is in the process

of setting the first global centre of traditional medicine in India.

It is at the same time we should not lose sight of Information and Communication Technology which has been one of our greatest facilitators in the overall fight against the pandemic. Starting from the delivery of basic goods and services, payments, children education, health tracking, surveillance to discharge of office works, digital conferences, and entertainment, just to quote a few, have been made possible with the intervention of ICT and Artificial Intelligence. Undoubtedly ICT and AI has become a part and parcel of our lives.

Thank you.