

MR. DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Mr. Minister, please.

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (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

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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

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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.

(CONTD. BY HK/1J)

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SHRI S. JAISHANKAR (CONTD.): 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.

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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 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

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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

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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.