

P.T. USHA, ILAIYARAJA AMONG FOUR PICKED FOR RAJYA SABHA

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P.T. Usha and Ilaiyaraaja Alexander Hassenstein

Olympic sprinter P.T. Usha, music composer Ilaiyaraaja, philanthropist Veerendra Heggade and screenwriter V. Vijayendra Prasad have been nominated to the Rajya Sabha in the category of eminent persons nominated by the President.

In total, the President nominates 12 persons as his nominees to the Rajya Sabha — persons known for their eminence in the fields of arts and letters, and public service. Of the 12, seven seats were vacant, of which four have now been filled.

The nominees are from the States of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh. The four nominees are achievers in their own right, but their selection also reflects a southern push by the Narendra Modi government.

Ms. Usha, born in Kozhikode in Kerala, is one of India's best known track-and-field stars. She also runs the Usha School of Athletics, training young athletes. She has been given the Arjuna Award and the Padma Shri in the past.

Mr. Ilaiyaraaja from Tamil Nadu, a recipient of the Padma Vibhushan and Padma Bhushan and many awards for his music, has composed more than 7,000 songs for more than 1,000 films (mainly in southern India), and has more than 20,000 concert performances to his credit.

Mr. Heggade has been the 'Dharmadhikari' (custodian) of the Dharmasthala temple in Karnataka from the age of 20. A philanthropist, he also runs the Shri Dharmasthala Manjunatheswara Educational Trust, which provides education through more than 25 institutions. He was awarded the Padma Vibhushan in 2015.

K.V. Vijayendra Prasad, who is from Andhra Pradesh, is the noted screenwriter behind the blockbuster movies *Baahubali* and *RRR* that have made waves in India and abroad.

Sivaji Ganesan (1982-86), Vyjayantimala Bali (1993-99) and "Cho" S. Ramaswamy (1999-2005) are the other Tamil film personalities who have served as nominated members of the Rajya Sabha.

Prime Minister Modi congratulated all four and cited their contributions in their respective fields.

"The remarkable P.T. Usha Ji is an inspiration for every Indian. Her accomplishments in sports are widely known but equally commendable is her work to mentor budding athletes over the last several years."

"The creative genius of Ilaiyaraaja Ji has enthralled people across generations. His works beautifully reflect many emotions. What is equally inspiring is his life journey — he rose from a humble background and achieved so much," Mr. Modi tweeted.

For Mr. Heggade, the Prime Minister said he was at the forefront of outstanding community

service.

Praising Mr. Prasad, Mr. Modi noted that he has been associated with the creative world for decades and his work showcases India's glorious culture and has made a mark globally.

(With PTI inputs)

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