

CENTRE TO EXPAND AIR BUBBLE PACT WITH MORE COUNTRIES

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Government policies & interventions for development in various Sectors and issues arising out of their design & implementation incl. Housing

Point of view: External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar speaking in the Lok Sabha on Monday. PTI

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on Monday told the Rajya Sabha that the government wanted to expand the “air bubble” arrangement with more countries and the priority would be Saudi Arabia, Kuwait in the west and Japan, China and Singapore in the east.

“These are the countries where bubbles have not worked so well,” Mr. Jaishankar told the Rajya Sabha.

Under the air bubble scheme, commercial airlines from specific countries are allowed to travel to and from India on a limited basis — an arrangement that was solely reserved for the Air India under the Vande Bharat mission — as full scale international commercial air operations are yet to resume after COVID-19 restrictions were implemented last year.

The Minister made these remarks while informing both Houses of Parliament about the Narendra Modi government’s efforts in repatriating Indians, Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) and Persons of Indian Origin (PIO) during the corona pandemic.

Calling it as the world’s biggest repatriation exercise that saw over 4.5 million people return home under the Vande Bharat Mission, Mr. Jaishankar said the focus had now shifted to Indians going back to their usual places of work, study and domicile and restoring employment opportunities abroad with the help of partner countries.

He said, so far, air transport bubble arrangements had been concluded with 27 countries.

The Minister said India was fully aware of the employment concerns of people working abroad and expects Gulf countries to facilitate the early return of those people who were compelled to return home due to the pandemic.

“From our recent interactions, we have reason to expect that partner governments in the Gulf would be helpful in facilitating the early return of many who were compelled to go back because of the pandemic,” he told the Lok Sabha.

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