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Title: Problems faced by the passengers of Air India.

SHRI K.C. VENUGOPAL (ALAPPUZHA): Mr. Chairman, Sir, thank you for giving me an opportunity.

I would like to invite the attention of this august House to the miseries and problems faced by the passengers of our national air carrier due to unjustifiable delay, cancellation and withdrawal of flights in the Middle East-Kerala sector. Within the short span of last one month, several incidents of flight cancellation and indefinite delay repeated with the Air India flights. These were creating harsh protest among the passengers who were held up in various airports, after booking tickets to reach their hometowns and work places.

On last July 30, 159 passengers bound for Doha and Bahrain were stranded at the Thiruvananthapuram International Airport at night after an Air India Express flight was grounded. The flight was grounded owing to shortage of cabin crew, enforcement of certain regulations of the Director-General of Civil Aviation and delay in arrival of the incoming flight.

IC 457 Kochi-Thiruvananthapuram-Bahrain-Doha flight, scheduled to depart from Kochi at 7.05 p.m. on Friday with 61 passengers, could commence the service only at 11.30 p.m. from the Cochin International Airport at Nedumbaserry. Ninety-nine more passengers boarded that aircraft in Thiruvananthapuram when the flight landed here at 12.15 a.m. But unfortunately, thereafter, the flight departed from Thiruvananthapuram Airport after 48 hours. There is no need to describe the mental harassment suffered by the passengers and bad consequences they were forced to face after the two days delay in the prior scheduled programmes.

Allegations are levelled that the entire lapse is taking place deliberately to help the private airlines operating in the same sector.

Also, it was unfair decision of the Air India to cancel three Air India Express flights from Thiruvananthapuram International Airport to Gulf countries and to cause undue delay and cancellation of flights to Gulf countries from Kerala and *vice-versa*. Now, the Air India management has decided to stop the service of Air India Express flights to Dubai, Sharjah and Abu Dhabi from next month. If they are cancelled, it should be adversely affecting a large number of NRIs employed in those countries. Also, this decision will help the private airlines operating from the Gulf sector to Kerala to hike their airfare to Kerala extremely and it has come as a big blow to the hundreds of NRIs. In fact, the Air India Express service was a great relief to the NRIs because of the lowest air fares and convenient timings.

Many of the passengers, who have booked tickets, due to these delays or cancelled flights, might even lose their jobs if they fail to get at their workplace in time.

Acute shortage of cabin crews is the cause for the cancellation and delay of flights, and the Civil Aviation Ministry should take necessary action to reinstate the cancelled services urgently as it is a serious issue, which will be affecting a large number of NRIs from Southern States of India. Also, the Government should give necessary direction for sufficient staff recruitment to inevitable posts for smooth operations of aircraft from Gulf-Kerala sector. Thank you, Sir.