GOVERNMENT OF INDIA MINISTRY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY DEPARTMENT OF BIOTECHNOLOGY

LOK SABHA STARRED QUESTION NO. *171 TO BE ANSWERED ON 30.07.2021

Genome Sequencing of New Variant of Coronavirus

*171. SHRI RAKESH SINGH:

Will the Minister of SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY विज्ञान और प्रौद्योगिकी मंत्री

be pleased to state:

- (a) whether genome sequencing is performed to identify a new variant of Coronavirus and if so, the details thereof;
- (b) whether genome sequencing has reduced in the country and its results are getting delayed thereby increasing the risk of infection;
- (c) if so, the detailed reasons therefor; and
- (d) whether the Government has taken any steps to make improvement in this regard and if so, the details thereof?

ANSWER

MINISTER OF STATE (INDEPENDENT CHARGE) OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY AND EARTH SCIENCES (DR. JITENDRA SINGH)

(a), (b), (c) & (d): A Statement is laid on the Table of the House.

STATEMENT IN RESPECT OF LOK SABHA STARRED QUESTION *171 TO BE ANSWERED ON 30/07/2021 REGARDING 'GENOME SEQUENCING OF NEW VARIANT OF CORONAVIRUS'

(a) The Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomics Consortium (INSCOG) a consortium of 28 genome sequencing laboratories of the Department of Biotechnology (DBT), Department of Science and Technology (DST), Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHF&W), Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), Ministry of Education, Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and State Governments was established as an Inter-Ministerial initiative with an overall objective to expand whole genome sequencing of SARS-CoV-2 virus across the nation, aiding our understanding of how the virus spreads and evolves. The specific objectives of INSACOG are; i) ascertain the current status of new variant of SARS-CoV-2 in the country; ii) establish a sentinel surveillance for early detection of genomic variants with public health implication; iii) determine the genomic variants in the unusual events/trends (super-spreader events, high mortality / morbidity trend areas etc.).

Since the inception of INSACOG till now the INSACOG has sequenced 58,240 SARS-CoV-2 genomes. Out of these 46,124 samples have been analyzed and assigned Pangolin lineage classification and submitted to the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) for public health correlation.

(b), (c), and (d) No, genome sequencing capacity has not been reduced in the country. The capacity has enhanced by expanding INSACOG network from 10 laboratories to 28 laboratories. Efforts in terms of expansion of INSACOG by onboarding more laboratories have been undertaken. Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) have been developed to accelerate the pace of genome sequencing in terms of the number of samples to be sequenced as well as the time for reporting and undertake sequencing of samples from hospitals and for sewerage surveillance as a public health tool to understand COVID-19 spread in a community. These initiatives provide significant scientific information to assist and guide the public health decisions for COVID-19 management in the country.
