

Title: Re: Need to check increasing incidents of violence against doctors and other healthcare professionals through Comprehensive Central Legislation.

DR. SHASHI THAROOR (THIRUVANANTHAPURAM): Sir, I thank you very much for allowing me to speak.

I wish to draw the attention of the hon. Minister towards the rising incidents of violence against doctors and other healthcare professionals in recent years. There is no Central data on the number of assault cases against healthcare workers or health facilities, but the Indian Medical Association estimates that 75 per cent of all doctors face some form of physical abuse during their service, with many cases of violence severely under-reported.

Sir, these are the people who are selflessly serving our citizens and attempting to save lives. Currently, no national level law comprehensively and categorically addresses this issue. State laws vary. The existing laws are weak in their implementation and lack scope to protect our healthcare workers. In fact, 11 States and Union Territories have no laws at all.

In 2019, this Government had introduced a draft Bill titled 'The Healthcare Service Personnel and Clinical Establishments (Prohibition of Violence and Damage to Property) Bill' which would have made such violence a non-bailable and cognizable offence with a jail term of up to five years. But this was withdrawn by the Government before it could be considered by Parliament, without assigning any reason.

Our healthcare professionals are neither adequately appreciated nor protected. It is imperative to realise that this is not just an issue for the medical fraternity. Violence against healthcare workers weakens our health system and affects the quality of services provided to patients, in turn leading to more risk of violence. Therefore, I urge the Health Minister - if necessary, the Minister of Home Affairs and the Minister of Law and Justice - to reintroduce a comprehensive Central legislation to put a check on violence against healthcare professionals at the earliest.

Thank you.