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Title: Regarding inclusion of Madurai in Bilateral Air Service Agreements (BASA) with Middle East and Far East countries.

SHRI T. RADHAKRISHNAN (VIRUDHUNAGAR): When Britishers ruled India they sent Indians to different countries to work in rubber, tea, palm & sugarcane plantations. 80% of these people are from Tamil Nadu & 50% belong to 8 southern districts of Tamil Nadu. After Independence Tamilians migrated to different parts of the world. At present over 2 million Indian Tamil people are working in various Gulf countries. All together 10 million Tamil Nadu people living overseas and it is the highest NRI from India. About 50% are from eight Southern districts of Tamil Nadu for which Madurai is the centre. Madurai being a major tourist destination and emerging medical tourism centre, the much deserved customs airport became a reality very lately.

Since Madurai is the major centre, all the eight southern districts depend on Madurai airports for their needs. Now Madurai has got a Custom clearance facility at the airport which handles over *one* million passengers per year. However, it has no international carriers operating to other countries except Sri Lankan airlines since Madurai is not included in Bilateral Air Service Agreements (BASA). It's being said that Madurai airport is not included *in* BASA of various Middle East and Far east nations which is being a barrier to introduce direct International flights from Madurai to much needed Dubai, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia), Saudi Arabia, Abu Dhabi and Muscat by the foreign airlines. It is high time for the Ministry of Civil Aviation to consider the plea of 8 districts of Southern Tamil Nadu and take necessary measures to include Madurai airport in the Bilateral treaties of various Middle East and Far

East nations as earlier as possible so that the foreign airlines can introduce direct services from Madurai to these nations.

Currently passengers in south Tamil Nadu have to travel to metros like Bangalore, Chennai or Trivandrum for affordable flights. Madurai is located at the southern of the state, this facilitates passenger to get better connectivity. By including Madurai under BASA, international carriers would be able to provide their services to different countries at an affordable cost. Presently international flights are being operated by the SpiceJet & Air India Express with good load factor. Madurai airport is having full infrastructure to meet the requirement of additional flights.

Beyond everything, the backward districts of Southern Tamil Nadu including Madurai district completely depend on Madurai airport for its Industrial and economic growth. The move enabling direct International flights from Madurai to Middle east and Far East nations, will boost up the Tourism, Medical, Tourism, Industrialization and Information Technology sector growth in the region. I urge upon the government to include Madurai in Bilateral Air Service Agreement so that foreign airlines can operate to and fro from Madurai Airport.