

LOK SABHA DEBATES

LOK SABHA

Thursday, March 6, 1997/Phalgun 15, 1918 (Saka)

*The Lok Sabha met at Two minutes
past Eleven of the Clock*

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

[*Translation*]

International Tourist Places in the Country

*181. SHRI DATTA MEGHE: Will the Minister of TOURISM be pleased to state:

(a) the details of International Tourist Places in the country, State/UT-wise;

(b) whether there is any proposal to convert some tourist places into International Tourist Places by increasing their standard and providing facilities there; and

(c) if so, the details thereof?

[*English*]

THE MINISTER OF PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS AND MINISTER OF TOURISM (SHRI SRIKANTA JENA): (a) to (c) Though there are a large number of places in the country which are visited by foreign tourists, none of them has been designated as international tourist place. The Government also does not have any system for declaring any place as an International Tourist Place.

[*Translation*]

SHRI DATTA MEGHE: Mr Speaker, Sir, the hon. Minister has given a technical and brief reply to my question and it seems that the concerned Ministry has not got my point.

In my question, I have clearly asked about the Union territory-wise and State-wise details of International tourist places in the country and whether the Government propose to raise the status of some tourist places into international tourist places by providing additional facilities. But hon. Minister has given just a brief and technical reply to it.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, through you I would like to draw the attention of the hon. Minister towards the fact that there are several big tourist places in the country which are visited by a large number of foreign tourists, but I have not got proper reply to my question. I had also asked about the tourist places visited by the foreign tourists and whether

they are given proper facilities or not? This has not been clarified and in the reply only it has been mentioned simply that many places are visited by the foreign tourists.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, I would like to tell the hon. Minister that our country earns a huge amount of foreign exchange through tourism and a large number of people get employment in this sector. Therefore, I would like to know the names of places visited by foreign tourists and whether these tourists are provided with proper facilities.

[*English*]

SHRI SRIKANTA JENA: Mr. Speaker, Sir, international tourists visit almost every part of the country. To say specifically percentage-wise foreign tourists' arrival at Mumbai is 63.82 per cent of the total foreign tourists; at Delhi, it is 55.78 per cent; at Chennai, it is 25.11 per cent. We have identified 38 places which the foreign tourists visit. Mumbai is the largest one because Mumbai has an international airport and from there only, the tourists go to Goa and other places.

As far as the arrival of foreign tourists in 1996 is concerned, the figure is 2.2 million and in this year, there has been seven per cent increase in the arrival of foreign tourists.

As regards the facilities that are being given to foreign tourists in places where foreign tourists are interested to go, in fact, I agree that the kind of infrastructure that is required to attract large number of foreign tourists is really inadequate in our country. It needs not only the effort of the Government of India but also the State Governments must come forward to develop the infrastructure for attracting foreign tourists to places where foreign tourists are coming in a large number. We are constantly in touch with the State Governments. I have asked the State Governments to prepare the master plans and that they may go ahead with them. The Government of India is helping them in giving whatever little help it can.

[*Translation*]

SHRI DATA MEGHE: Mr. Speaker, Sir, just now Hon. Minister has told that a large number of tourists visit Mumbai. It is a central place. Ajanta and Elora in Maharashtra and Taj Mahal are also visited by a large number of tourists. I would like to know about the amount of foreign exchange earned during last two years by tourism sector. Tourist places can be developed properly if we spend the amount equivalent to the foreign exchange earned through tourism. Apart from the foreign tourists, Indian tourists also visit Mumbai and they go to Ajanta and Elora caves. Similarly there are several tourist places in Vidarbha which can be developed properly. I would like to know from the hon. Minister whether his Ministry has any proposal to develop these tourist places. Earlier a large number of tourists used to visit Kashmir. Now a

Democratic Government has been constituted in Kashmir. If normalcy is restored there the tourist will start visiting Kashmir. In view of it I would like to know whether the Government has formulated any plan to boost tourism there.

There are several beautiful tourist places and forests in Vidarbha like forests of Taduva and Nagasaar. The hon. Minister should give assurance for the development of at least one tourist place in Vidarbha. The Ministry of tourism has spent a huge amount in Vidarbha and Maharashtra especially on Ajanta and Elora caves but even then no satisfactory arrangements have been made there. I would like to know whether the tourism Ministry has formulated any plan for the development of tourist spots in near future. I would like to say that more funds be provided for the development of tourist places? I would also like to know about the plan of the Government for increasing employment opportunity in this sector.

SHRI BANWARI LAL PUROHIT: Mr. Speaker, Sir, I also support this point.

[English]

MR. SPEAKER: Very good.

SHRI SRIKANTA JENA: Sir, there are three aspects. One is the total foreign exchange being earned by the tourism sector itself. So far as foreign exchange earning by the tourism sector of the country is concerned, we stand in the second position today. And as per the target by the end of this century, we will be in the first position in foreign exchange earning from the tourism sector of the country. In 1996, Rs.10,061 crore was the foreign exchange earning of the country from the tourism sector. The increase in the previous year was 16.5 per cent. The increase in the trend is such that we will be, in the next two years, in the first position so far as foreign exchange earning is concerned.

There are certain problems that are coming in our way. I am not satisfied about the number of foreign tourists coming to our country which is hardly 2.2 millions whereas the increase could have been slightly higher. So far as China is concerned, 83 million tourists go to China, five million tourists go to Singapore and five million tourists go to countries like Malaysia. So, for a country of our size, the figure should have been much more than that. But there are problems like the immigration problem, the visa problem, accessibility and airports facilities in different parts of the country where people are interested to go. So, we have to provide certain facilities so that foreign tourists come here in a big way. Recently, the Tourism Minister of Indonesia was telling me that they have allowed 46 countries visa free and they can come straightaway and get visa at the entry point of the airport itself. But in our country, even the NRIs are facing problems to come to our country. Therefore, I am taking up this issue with the Ministry of External Affairs and the Ministry of Home Affairs so that the visa problem is sorted out and more number of tourists can come and spend their money here.

For the Ajanta-Elora caves, Rs.83.11 crore has been received from OECF and the money is being spent. Our target is, by 1997-98 the entire project that was conceived will be over. Whatever facilities are required, these will be through by that time.

So far as special tourism area is concerned, it was finalised when Mr.Scindia was the Minister in charge of Tourism. It was finalised at that time that *Sindhu Durg* in Maharashtra was one of the important tourist places. The State Government is preparing a master plan for it. As soon as the master plan is ready or the details are ready, the Government will support this particular project.

[Translation]

SHRI DATTA MEGHE: Mr. Speaker, Sir, I asked about Vidarbha also.

[English]

SHRI SRIKANTA JENA: The Government of India will certainly include more such areas provided the State Government gives the feasibility report.

SMT. RAJANI PATIL: Mr. Speaker, Sir, as the hon. Member has also mentioned the Ajanta-Elora caves of Maharashtra are in Marathvada region which is mainly visited by international tourists. But there are no proper transportation facilities between the airport and Ajanta-Elora caves. I would like to know from the hon. Minister as to what is being done in this regard.

Rainy season is called slack-season in tourism parlance. It rains very rarely in Saudi Arabia. As the hon. Member has also mentioned the Taduva forests can be a good tourist place for people of Saudi Arabia especially for those who visit Mumbai to enjoy rainy season. I would like to ask whether the Government has any such package programme so that we can earn a huge amount of foreign exchange also. Has the Government any proposal in this regard?

[English]

SHRI A.C. JOS: More people should go to Meghalaya.

MR. SPEAKER: They have to go to Meghalaya.

SHRI SRIKANTA JENA: Ajanta-Elora is one of the most important tourist destinations and it is getting the top attention of the Government of India and also of the Government of Maharashtra. I am sure, by the completion of OECF project the minimum that is required there will be available and more number of tourists will go there. I hope that by the end of 1997-98 financial year the first and the second phase of OECF project will be over, with the result the inadequate facilities that are there will be taken care of.

[Translation]

We will invite tourists if they wish to visit the area to see rainfall.

[English]

SHRI MADHAVRAO SCINDIA: Tourism is an area with tremendous potential, which is very much neglected on the national agenda. The hon. Minister has said that it is the second largest net foreign exchange earner. It used to be the first. It must have swayed a bit, but there is a lot of potential as the hon. Minister himself has admitted. The real problem is, whatever the Central Government will do, the State Government behaves in a dis-coordinated fashion. You try and promote tourism in a particular area, suddenly Sales Tax is slapped on or suddenly the hotel tax is slapped on. There has to be greater coordination. Does the Government propose to take up this matter, my suggestion would be, at the National Development Council meeting? Let the State Ministers be told that the Centre is prepared to develop the special tourism area but in these special areas - if not in the entire State, at least in the earmarked areas - no tax will be slapped on without consultation with the Central Government and total coordination will be established between the Central Government and the State Government at least in the earmarked areas. Would you propose to take up that?

SHRI SRIKANTA JENA: I fully agree with the hon. Member. Next month itself I am going to call a Tourism Ministers' Conference. We are working out a policy paper on tourism for the next five years. We will first discuss this issue in the Tourism Minister's Conference. I will certainly take up the issue in the National Development Council.

Five such special tourism areas have been identified, one each in Kerala, Orissa, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Daman & Diu... (Interruptions) These proposals came from the State Governments. In consultation with the State Governments, these five places have been identified in different parts of the country. We can identify more such places. The point is, as has been mentioned by the hon. Member, we identify the places but a lot of money is required for infrastructure development. For example, for Baikal project, we require Rs. 130 crore for infrastructure development and the State Government has asked for Rs. 20 crore from the Government of India. The quantum of money required is high and much money is not available from the Planning Commission.

[Translation]

SHRI DATTA MEGHE: It is not done even at places where infrastructure is available. That is the point.

[English]

SHRI SRIKANTA JENA: The point is, the kind of importance that is required to be given to tourism should be given by the State Governments as well as the Planning Commission. I will certainly take up this issue at the Planning Commission level, at the National Development Council level and also at the State Ministers' Conference level. Tourism is the most important area. It is the only area where we can double our foreign exchange every

year. We can take care of our Oil Pool shortage if tourism is doubled, and without much investment we can earn more foreign exchange. I need the support of the House, the Planning Commission and also the State Government. Basically, tourism is a State subject. State Governments must come forward and provide more money for tourism development in their budgets.

Just imagine, the total budget of the Ministry of Tourism was Rs. 90 crore and the foreign exchange earning was 10,000 crore ! If you enhance the budget of the Tourism Ministries slightly at the State and the Central level, automatically it will have its repercussions, and more infrastructure can be built up.

That apart, Sir there are bottlenecks at the airport and in immigration for foreign tourists. Foreign tourists should not face such problems. They should be able to come to India in the same way as they go to other countries. You have seen how tourists are treated in other countries. We must treat tourists in that way. We do not have money, they have money and they want to spend money to visit our beaches and tourism destinations. We must provide facilities for them. The Government of India will certainly play a catalytic role in providing facilities to attract more tourists to our country so that we can earn more foreign exchange.

SHRI MADHAVRAO SCINDIA: Mr. Speaker, Sir, my point is that the Government of India should tell the State Governments, "We would not establish special tourism areas unless we get a commitment from you". They should tell the State Governments, "We are prepared to establish special tourism areas provided you give us a commitment that you will not be tampering with the incentive or disincentive system without consulting us. Then only we will be establishing a special tourism area."

MR. SPEAKER: Mr. Sayeed please. Let us hear about Lakshadweep.

SHRI P.M. SAYEED: Mr. Speaker, Sir, I come from India's emerald islands, the paradise for tourism. I have been associated with this Ministry as a member of the Standing Committee. We have been saying that even though the infrastructure is available, there is absolute lack of coordination. For example, in Lakshadweep we have identified three islands. One of them is already on the map of the world and two other islands fulfil all requirements for tourism. Whatever is needed for tourism is available there. Within a record time of eleven months we have constructed an airstrip but that is not made use of. The biggest block is coming from the Environment Ministry. They are not giving clearance both in Andaman and Nicobar Islands and in Lakshadweep. Let there be some coordinating cell in the Ministry of Tourism so that these things are cleared. This Government is nine months old now but such an effort is not made by this Ministry so far. I want a categorical answer from the Minister as to whether he is going to set up such a coordination cell or not.

SHRI SRIKANTA JENA: As you know, Sir, Lakshadweep

is one of the most important destinations and I fully agree with the hon. Member. Like Bali in Indonesia, we also can develop Lakshadweep. The point is the CRZ. The environmental problem is not in the hands of the Government of India. It has gone to the Supreme Court and the Supreme Court has said that CRZ restrictions have to be maintained.

Therefore, any development in Lakshadweep or in Andaman and Nicobar....(Interruptions)

SHRI P.M. SAYEED: I am sorry, he is misleading. That is not applicable to Lakshadweep. I have already cleared that point. Even then the Ministry of Environment is coming in the way.

MR. SPEAKER: It is a specific question. Will you have a Coordination Cell?

SHRI SRIKANTA JENA: If there is any bottleneck from the Ministry of Environment, I will certainly take it up with them....(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: I know, I will allow a little more time because Shri Jena has a very rare opportunity to answer.

SHRI V. DHANANJAYA KUMAR: The question pertains to the places of tourism having international importance. My question is very short.

We have two places in our country - one is Agra where Taj Mahal is situated and the other is Sravanabelagola where Gomateshwara Statue is situated. Both of these are considered as the wonders of the world.

I would like to know from the hon. Minister whether these places would be developed to an international standard so that the foreign tourists visit these places:

MR. SPEAKER: I do not think that there is anything....
(Interruptions)

SHRI SRIKANTA JENA: Sir, as you know, Agra is one of our most important tourist destinations and it is the World Heritage Centre. The number of foreign tourists visiting Agra is the highest in the country as compared to other tourist destinations.

So far as the Sravanabelagola project is concerned, the Government of Karnataka has submitted a project report. After getting the proposal from the State Government, we will certainly see that whatever best is possible to assess this project, we will certainly do that.

Regarding the Agra-Taj Mahal project, I would like to say that a project report was submitted a few year back. The State Government and the Central Ministries connected with the Agra Regional Development are doing some work, but it has so far not been done to our satisfaction. We can do a lot many things. I had taken a meeting recently. I will take up this meeting again very soon to see how best we can do in regard to Agra Heritage Centre.

MR. SPEAKER: Shri G.G.Swell.

Let us go to some other destination, not always Agra.

(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: I know, everybody is interested in this question.

(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: I know, everybody wants to ask the question. What can I do? Let us go to North-East.

SHRI G.G.SWELL: Sir, I would like to draw the attention of the hon. Minister. I think the Minister is aware that more and more tourists in the world are interested in eco-tourism. In that respect, my State as well as the State of Mr. Speaker is an ideal place. It has a beautiful climate; we have a national park there; we have rare animals; we have rare plants; we have some of the longest caves in the world. I am sure that one of them is the largest and the longest in the whole of the sub-continent. We would like to develop that area. Apart from earning foreign exchange, you can give employment to the local people.

MR. SPEAKER: That is right.

SHRI G.G.SWELL: What are you doing about that?
...(Interruptions)...

MR. SPEAKER: Kerala has been covered. Kerala is a known place.

SHRI SRIKANTA JENA: In the North-Eastern States, we have set up a Special Task Force to submit a report for the development of tourism.

As per the guidelines given to us, ten per cent of the total budgetary allocation of all the Ministries will be spent for North-Eastern States. For this year, 1997-98, Rs.11 crore is available. For the first time, such a quantum of money is available for tourism development in the entire North-Eastern States. While doing so, I will take care of Meghalaya in particular because Mr. Speaker, you come from Meghalaya. I will certainly look into it.

MR. SPEAKER: Since I have got this assurance, now I will go to the next question.

(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: You will have enough opportunity during the discussion on the General Budget. I am sorry, not now.

(Interruptions)

[Translation]

AN HON. MEMBER: Mr. speaker, Sir, Half-an-Hour discussion should be continued on it.

[English]

MR. SPEAKER: It is for the Minister to see. I think the Minister has no objection. You give a notice. The Minister has agreed for Half-an-Hour Discussion. Now, next question.