

Title: Need to release funds for preservation and protection of art objects of archaeological and cultural value found in Tamil Nadu and reopen the closed archeological information centres in the State.

SHRI P. MOHAN (MADURAI): Hon. Deputy Speaker Sir, ancient temples and mahals are there in good number in Tamil Nadu. These places have rich treasures of invaluable Panchloha idols, carved stone sculptures, artefacts like engraved copper sheets and ancient palm leaves. These ancient treasures that vouchsafe for the rich cultural traditions must be conserved, preserved and protected. In order to ensure their maintenance with the financial assistance from the Centre there used to be seven centres in Tamil Nadu. These centres were there in Chennai, Madurai, Chidambaram, Coimbatore, Thanjavur, Tiruchirappalli, Tirunelveli. Register offices were there in these 7 centres. In 1987 the number of these centres were reduced to four due to paucity of funds as the fund flow from the Centre was not regular and most often much delayed. The central assistance was released in a non-systematic way. It would stop for ten months at one go and after that delay Central fund would be released just for 2 months. This indifferent way of assisting the conservation of our ancient treasures had resulted in the closure of archeological registration information centres further. The Government of Tamil Nadu was forced to close down two of the 4 such centres in 1991. Even now the Central assistance is not forthcoming periodically. That is why even the existing two centres are about to be closed down in the month of May this year. This forebodes danger to the invaluable ancient sculptures made of five metal alloys and quality granite stones. There are about two lakh panchaloha sculptures in Tamil Nadu. But only about 50,000 are registered and preserved. The remaining sculptures of about one and a half lakh are not found in the record and face the danger of being robbed and smuggled out of the country. When such a threat persists to our ancient treasures even the remaining two centres face closure. In Tamil Nadu there are 30 districts now. I do not insist upon setting up 30 centres for each district. It would be better that the 7 centres that were there till 1987 are revived and put in operation there. Now that there are only 2 such offices the officials have to spend considerable amount on Travelling Allowances to visit several places for registering art objects to ensure their conservation and protection. Considering the hardship and financial crunch Tamil Nadu Government is hard pressed to close down even the existing two archeological information centres. Hence I urge upon the Union Government to intervene so as to ensure emergency measures to provide funds for the conservation and protection of these priceless cultural objects. All the 7 offices must become operational with liberal assistance from the Centre. Hence I request the Centre to release funds in time in an appropriate manner to reopen all the Centres that used to be there. With this I conclude, thank you.

*Translation of the speech originally delivered in Tamil.