

Need for adequate air transport service in the North-East.

SHRI BIJOY HANDIQUE (JORHAT): Sir, adequate growth of air transport service in the North-East bordered on the east by Myanmar, on the north by China and Bhutan and on the south by Bangladesh is the only way out of geo-political isolation. Because of its location and geographical condition, the connection of the North-East with the rest of the country by road and rail is through a narrow strip of land in West Bengal, North of Bangladesh. Most of the places in the North-Eastern States are inaccessible and located in far-flung areas where no proper road or rail transportation facilities are available due to difficult terrain conditions. Mass transportation facilities, like roadways, are available mainly in the plain areas of Assam on both banks of the river Brahmaputra. There is no developed inland water service in the region. In such a State, though air transport service cannot be a mass transportation mode because of its cost components, yet it is the only link intra-regionally as well as with the rest of the country, particularly for defence and development.

So, it is imperative that there is more imaginative and more rational reorganisation of air transport service. The long pending decision that Guwahati airport be made the regional hub connecting every existing airport in the region be immediately implemented since it is the gateway to the North-East. Besides, the dozen airstrips built during the World War II need to be made functional to augment the air services. At the same time, considering the geo-political importance of the region, the air fare should be subsidised significantly.

The Government must seriously address these urgent needs of the development in the North-East.

SHRI SOMNATH CHATTERJEE (BOLPUR): This is very important, Sir. The hon. Home Minister knows the difficult terrain in the North-East area. Everybody knows it. Sir, nearly the whole of Eastern India and North-East India is suffering very seriously because of inadequate facilities so far as air journeys are concerned. I strongly support Shri Handique. The hon. Home Minister is here and I hope he will take a note of it. The Minister of Civil Aviation is not here; hardly he is seen in the House. I do not know the reason for that.