

Title: Demand to restore the Calcutta-Tokyo Air India flights and increase the frequency of flights of British Airways.

SHRI SOMNATH CHATTERJEE: Mr. Speaker, Sir, the matter that I want to raise relates to the Ministry of Civil Aviation and a decision of Air India. Shri Sharad Yadav had requested me to raise it today because he would be here. But I do not find him here; probably he is held up due to his fight with Shri Ram Vilas Paswan, which is going on at Patna.

Sir, I wanted to refer to you and to the hon. Members of this House a very unfriendly decision, to put it very mildly, taken about the availability of international air services for Eastern and North Eastern India, operated through the Calcutta Airport, which is an international airport. They say that the Government of India is investing money for upgrading and further improving the international air services.

There was one flight in a week from Calcutta to Tokyo and back, which is to originate from Mumbai. It was operating on the route of Mumbai-Calcutta-Tokyo. I have got the full particulars with me here that more than 50 per cent of the passengers of that flight board from Calcutta. Though I have got the full particulars, I do not wish to trouble you with that.

So far as cargo is concerned, whatever space was available for cargo was fully loaded from Calcutta. As a matter of fact, the demand for cargo space was three to four times more than what was available. Air India is not providing cargo space, but other airlines have increased their cargo flights from once a week to four times a week.

Singapore Airlines has increased. Royal Jordanian has increased. All other airlines are also increasing. But Air India has withdrawn arbitrarily even without bothering to take anybody into confidence. Discuss it with the people. The MPs from the North-East and Eastern India are here. The Governments are there. What has happened today is that only the Air India flight has been withdrawn. Now, we have to go to Mumbai for the purpose of going to Tokyo. An amazing attitude has been taken. I wrote to the hon. Minister, Shri Ananth Kumar. He was earlier there. I had requested him for an increase in the frequency of flights of British Airways.

Lord Swaraj Paul had assured me that he would help. But he has done good for Bangalore. Instead of that, he has made Bangalore an international airport. I do not mind it. Do it. That was your achievement during your tenure. But why is this step-motherly attitude towards Eastern India and North-Eastern India? How can you have the development of the country? If today, you are talking of international participation – international investment – people are coming here. You are criticising us that the people are not going to Eastern India and North-East India. But how will they come here? The people have said that for coming to Delhi, it takes one day. We can go back from here. Three or four days have to be spent to come to Calcutta. This is not only West Bengal but also Orissa, Bihar, Assam and North-East India. Every State is suffering.

I am happy that Shri Digvijay Singh agrees with me. This is a very serious matter. I also wrote to Shri Ibrahim earlier and Shri Ananth Kumar more than once. Singapore Airlines have requested for Government's permission in writing for more flights. But it has not been granted. British Airways requested for more flights. Even this has not been granted. On the other hand, they have asked to increase 16 flights because of the Government's decision not to allow more flights. And they have been asked to operate from Mumbai and Delhi. They have gone there. What will happen to this? That part of the country will not have the benefit of even these simple facilities which will allow us interaction with the outside world and people going there. I have got full particulars. More than 50 per cent passengers have boarded from Calcutta. What is the crime that we have committed there. I hope the House will unanimously support our request to the Government. ...(*Interruptions*)

It is not a question of any particular area. It is a question of development of the country as a whole. Therefore, I appeal to all the Members. I want every city and every State to develop. I do not mind more flights from Mumbai. I do not mind flights from Bangalore or any other place. Let them come. This country must have equal facilities. ...(*Interruptions*) Now, you are a leader. I congratulate you on your appointment. Please support us.

I strongly support this request of the House with all humility. Please see that this is restored immediately. The flight which has been abandoned should not only be resumed immediately but also more flights should be allowed through and from Calcutta.

MR. SPEAKER: Shri Hannan Mollah and Shri Sontosh Mohan Dev have given notices on the same subject. They can associate in brief.

SHRI SONTOSH MOHAN DEV (SILCHAR): Sir, on behalf of the North-Eastern seven States, I strongly associate myself with the sentiments expressed by Shri Somnath Chatterjee and also from the Congress Party. But, at the same time, I condemn the step-motherly attitude of Air India and also Indian Airlines towards North-Eastern and Eastern India.

One flight was given thanks to Shri Ananth Kumar. What has happened to him? He gave it sometime back. But now, it is being taken away. Why? What is the harm? The cottage industry in the North-Eastern region has got upset. Now, they can send their products to Japan. These have got a good demand. But by discontinuing this service, you are doing a disservice to the North-Eastern Region as well as the Eastern Region.

I strongly demand from the hon. Minister – the concerned Minister is not present here – Shri Pramod Mahajan to take it up and see that it is not discontinued. This is irrespective of the demand of the whole Eastern India towards the Government of India.

MR. SPEAKER: Shri Hannan Mollah, you can also associate with him....(*Interruptions*)

SHRI HANNAN MOLLAH (ULUBERIA): Sir, it is in the context of the new trend of more investment in West Bengal and the eastern parts of this country.

(q/1215/rs/jr)

Sir, non-availability of airlines will create problems and it will harden the way of development in that region. Orissa, Bihar and other neighbouring States will also be benefited if this is restored. So, I would request the Government that this should be immediately restored, the British Airways should not be withdrawn and more flights be given to that region....(*Interruptions*)

MR. SPEAKER: I have received 50 notices for "Zero Hour" today.

...(*Interruptions*)

डा. रघुवंश प्रसाद सिंह (वैशाली) : माननीय सदस्य ने जो सवाल उठाया है, हम भी उसका समर्थन करते हैं।

SHRI PRIYA RANJAN DASMUNSI (RAIGANJ): Sir, I fully support the contentions expressed by Shri Sontosh Mohan Dev and Shri Somnath Chatterjee. Unless this is done by the Government quickly, it will give a message that there is a step motherly treatment given by this Government to the North-Eastern Region. So, I demand that it should be restored immediately.

श्री शिवराजसिंह चौहान (विदिशा) : अध्यक्ष महोदय, इस देश की एक तिहाई से ज्यादा जनता गरीबी रेखा से नीचे जीती है। गरीबी और बीमारी का चोली-दामन का साथ है। हजारों बीमारियां उनके शरीर में घर किए रहती हैं। जब वे पैसा उधार लेकर दवा खरीदते हैं (व्यवधान)

SHRI BASU DEB ACHARIA (BANKURA): Sir, the entire House is unanimous on this. The hon. Minister should respond to the demand made by the entire House....(*Interruptions*) Sir, the hon. Minister should inform the House why this was withdrawn. We demand that it should be restored immediately....(*Interruptions*)

MR. SPEAKER: Is it necessary that all the Members speak on the same subject.

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SHRI SUDIP BANDYOPADHYAY : Sir, this is very important. Regarding this issue, the hon. Minister of Railways, Kumari Mamata Banerjee, had already drawn the attention of the hon. Minister of Civil Aviation. Shri Somnath Chatterjee knows it well.

Sir, Air India has made a loss of Rs.300 crore in the last three years. They have no imagination actually which routes have to be operated properly. I would like to know why the flight to Japan is withdrawn unnecessarily. The British Airways is also going to take the same type of decision. Sir, the airport at Kolkata is an international airport....(*Interruptions*)

THE MINISTER OF RAILWAYS (KUMARI MAMATA BANERJEE): Only one flight is operating.

SHRI SUDIP BANDYOPADHYAY : Yes, only one flight is operating.

MR. SPEAKER: Is Kumari Mamata Banerjee speaking or Shri Sudip Bandyopadhyay speaking?

KUMARI MAMATA BANERJEE: Sir, there is only one flight, it is a fact.

SHRI SUDIP BANDYOPADHYAY : So, we earnestly urge the Government that these flights have to be restored and good quality of flights have to be given on this route. We fully associate ourselves with the hon. Members who have raised this issue.

SHRI PRAMOD MAHAJAN: Sir, the hon. Members...(Interruptions)

श्री बसुदेव आचार्य : अनंत कुमार जी बोलना चाहते थे, आपने मना कर दिया।...(Interruptions)

SHRI PRAMOD MAHAJAN: Actually, he wanted to pay back the left-handed compliment given by Shri Somnath Chatterjee. I thought it would create more problems, so I asked him not to say that...(Interruptions)

SHRI SOMNATH CHATTERJEE : I supported the Bangalore Airport.

SHRI PRAMOD MAHAJAN: Sir, the Government fully appreciates the concern expressed by all the Members for the additional flights, domestic as well as international, in the North-Eastern sector...(Interruptions)

SHRI BASU DEB ACHARIA: Eastern and North-Eastern sectors.

SHRI PRAMOD MAHAJAN: Sir, next time when I answer, I expect Shri Basudeb Acharia to give his submission in writing so that it will be easy for me to read it out and satisfy him.

Sir, hon. Member, Shri Somnath Chatterjee has already spoken with the Civil Aviation Minister about this. It is true that even in North-East...(Interruptions)

SHRI SOMNATH CHATTERJEE : The Civil Aviation Minister was to be here today.

SHRI PRAMOD MAHAJAN: Sir, the hon. Member should look at the time-table of the NDA before raising a matter in the House.

SHRI SOMNATH CHATTERJEE : At his request, I did not mention it yesterday. He came to me and asked me to raise it on Thursday as he would be back that day. But Shri Ram Vilas Paswan has created more problems for him, what can I do?

SHRI PRAMOD MAHAJAN: So, Sir, even in the North-East also I realised that in the seven States plus Sikkim, the flights have been reduced in the last eight to ten years instead of increasing them. The terrain there needs more air links than any other part of our country, comparatively. So, I will draw the attention of the Civil Aviation Minister on the issues raised here. I am sure that he will take necessary steps.

SHRI SOMNATH CHATTERJEE: I would request the hon. Minister to ask him to refer to the points and not about the Rajya Sabha episode.

SHRI PRAMOD MAHAJAN: So, he will see that the Tokyo flight from Kolkata is continued again and some flights are increased in North-East. I will take this up with him.

SHRI SOMNATH CHATTERJEE : Sir, I thank the hon. Minister for this.