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Title : Forced closure of National Highway 31A by GJMM in West Bengal leading to untold misery to people of Sikkim and other visitors.

SHRI PREM DAS RAI (SIKKIM): Sir, I would like to bring to the notice of this august House the pain that the people of Sikkim have to bear with every blockage of the National Highway 31A, which is the lifeline and only access to the State of Sikkim.

Since two days now, the Highway is closed on account of agitation by GJMM seeking redressal of their grievances. I understand that this is an indefinite *bandh* and blockage. Sikkim is landlocked; we have no other means of getting there. We have to depend on food and other materials of daily living on this lifeline, and our people have to bear the hardship, the cost and the loss of business when this Highway is disrupted for whatever reason. We also depend on tourism for our livelihood. Hence, it puts tourists into trouble as well as disrupts daily life and living.

Furthermore, at this time, parents and teachers and children are moving back and forth for entry into colleges all across the country. Moreover, many patients seek medical help in other parts of the country. But the sad part is that this Highway is closed down on account of agitations in the State of West Bengal ever since 1987. If we calculate the loss of business and costs paid by our people and visitors on account of rise in prices, this will be colossal. I will bring this number to the notice of the House in due course. Mental anguish of the people of Sikkim, however, cannot be measured in terms of just money.

Sikkim is the most peaceful State in the country. We want to get on with the work of ensuring speedy development of our mountain State and its people. We do not want to be held ransom every time there is a rise in political temperature across the border in North Bengal. We, in Sikkim, view this as a problem that needs urgent attention and intervention of the Central Government.

I, therefore, seek the Central Government's intervention immediately to put an end to this kind of treatment meted out to our State for which we have no means to protect ourselves from.