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Title: Need to formulate a special programme to boost tourism in Odisha.

SHRI BAIJAYANT PANDA (KENDRAPARA): The tourism potential of Bhitarkanika and Gahirmatha wildlife sanctuaries, and the Buddhist site Lalitgiri in Kendrapara, Odisha, is largely unutilized. While Kendrapara is a specific example, similar problems plague other tourist destinations in Odisha such as the hot springs of Atari, Taptapani and Simlipal National Park, to name a few.

The Planning Commission ranks the tourism industry as the second largest in providing employment to semi-skilled and unskilled workers in the country. Hence, the promotion of tourism in Odisha will also facilitate increased economic opportunities to its people.

In order to attract national and international tourists to Odisha, there is an urgent need to expeditiously improve the tourism infrastructure, increasing air connectivity to Bhubaneswar and formulating creative branding and marketing strategies.

The Odisha Government recently announced the development of the Buddhist circuit in the State. On top priority is the 'Diamond Triangle' of Lalitgiri-Ratnagiri-Udaygiri. In addition to this, ASI announced that it will build a museum at Lalitgiri. These measures are a positive sign of the attention being given to the earlier neglected sites. But, a lot more needs to be done.

In his address at the photography exhibition organized for promoting tourism in Kendrapara in August 2012, the then Minister of Tourism, Shri Subodh Kant Sahay assured us of increased central assistance to Odisha. I, therefore, urge the Central Government to sanction a special programme to boost tourism in Odisha. The measures mentioned above combined with increased funding from the Centre will do wonders for tourism in my state.