

directly from Delhi, Government should construct Mussafirkhanas at Delhi.

The Government should also arrange direct flights from Srinagar to Jeddah for the pilgrims of Kashmir from the next year. I urge that all these reformative measures may be taken in right earnest.

(v) Demand for S.T.D. facilities in Pathanamthitta district in Kerala

PROF. P.J. KURIEN (Idukki) : Pathanamthitta is the only district in Kerala which does not have STD facilities. This district was formed a few years back but it has not so far been put on the STD network. Although the microwave station has been completed, due to non-availability of some vital equipment, it could not be commissioned.

This district contributes substantially to the economy of the country with its cash crops like rubber, pepper, cardamom, etc. With the largest number of schools, colleges and technical institutions, it has the highest literacy rate in the State. Perhaps the largest number of people from a single district working in the Gulf countries are also from Pathanamthitta. In the absence of STD facilities, the growing needs of faster communication cannot be met. This has affected the development of this district.

I would, therefore, request the Minister of Communications to direct the concerned authorities to immediately supply the equipment needed and introduce STD in Pathanamthitta at the earliest.

(vi) Need to exempt International awards and prizes won by our artists/sportsmen from customs duty

SHRI RANJIT SINGH GAEKWAD (Baroda) : India with its rich culture and heritage has produced some of the finest artists in the world in the field of visual arts such as sculpture, painting, graphics and photography. Most of these artists who have won international awards are from a humble background. Due to the prohibitive cost of art aids and materials

they find it difficult to fully meet their art needs even in India. Hence when they receive international awards and prizes, they are unable to bring them home because of the customs regulations of the Government. For example, a well known photographer having won a camera as price in an international photography exhibition has been unable to bring it into the country as he is unable to pay the customs duty which runs into thousands of rupees. We seem to have overlooked the fact that whenever any of the countrymen get an international award it is also a recognition for our country. So far only a handful of sportsmen have been allowed to bring in their awards without paying customs duty.

Therefore, I request the Government to look into the matter in this perspective and show them appreciation and acknowledgement by declaring these international awards and prizes won by artists as non-dutiable commodities. This will go a long way in encouraging arts and sports in the country. It will further boost morale of our young artists and sportsmen who need every support and encouragement to reach the highest potential of their talent.

[Translation]

(vii) Need to improve Telephone services in Varanasi region of Uttar Pradesh

SHRI ZAINUL BASHER (Ghazipur) : There has been continuous deterioration in the telephone services in the Varanasi region of eastern Uttar Pradesh. In an important city like Varanasi, 40 to 50 per cent telephones remain out of order daily. The situation of telephone services in Ghazipur, Ballia, Jaunpur, Azamgarh, Mau and Bhadohi cities near Varanasi is even more pitiable. In the villages, the telephones remain out of order for days and even for months together. The trunk service in Varanasi is very inefficient. Although one can get telephone connection for big cities from Varanasi but it is very difficult to get telephone connection from there for small towns located nearby. The trunk exchange of Varanasi plays an