

[2 August, 2002]

RAJYA SABHA

under your Ministry. At that time, you had said: "The Ministry of Agriculture covers everything." So, it is your own admission.

SHRI AJIT SINGH: But, exclude the waste management.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Time management is my job, and I think, enough time has been spent on this question without getting much support. Now Question No. 282. (*Interruptions*) I have to manage questions. The job of the Chairperson is, if the answer is going to be the same, he should move on to the other question. (*Interruptions*).

Forest area for Rope-way in A.P.

*282. SHRI K. RAMA MOHANA RAO: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether any request has been received from Andhra Pradesh Government for surveying the forest area of Sri Venkateswara Wildlife Sanctuary, for a rope-way project;

(b) if so, the details of the request; and

(c) the steps contemplated by the Ministry in this regard?

THE MINISTER FOR ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI T. R. BAALU): (a) to (c) A statement is laid on the Table of the House.

Statement

(a) and (b) A request has been received from Government of Andhra Pradesh for undertaking a survey in Sri Venkateswara Wildlife Sanctuary for installation of a modern rope-way to connect Tirumala and Tirupati.

(c) The Ministry has accorded permission for carrying out preliminary survey for installation of the rope-way subject to the conditions that during the process of survey no tree will be felled or vegetation including grass removed as contained in the order of Supreme Court dated 14.2.2000 in Writ Petition No. 202/1995. The permission for survey is not to be construed as any commitment on the part of the Ministry to support the project. The proposal will ultimately also need the approval of the Indian Board for Wildlife and the Supreme Court.

SHRI K. RAMA MOHANA RAO: Madam, first of all, I wholeheartedly express my gratitude to the hon. Minister on behalf of the State Government of Andhra Pradesh for according early sanction to take up the survey work in compartment nos. 124 and 125 of the Tirumala hills reserve forest for a rope-way. The idea behind installing the proposed modern rope-way is to reduce the air pollution in that area. Once the project is completed, there would be a remarkable 40 per cent reduction in the air and noise pollution in that region. The State Government of Andhra Pradesh has already started the work on the preparation of the project report. Would the hon. Minister assure us that as soon as the State Government of Andhra Pradesh submits the report, he would pursue the matter and get the clearance from the Indian Board of Wildlife and the hon. Supreme Court, since approval of both these institutions is needed for the installation of a rope-way.

SHRI T. R. BAALU: Madam, the Andhra Pradesh Government, especially the Ministry of Tourism Development, had requested the Central Government for giving permission to undertake a preliminary survey for the rope-way, of which 4.5 kms. run in the non-forest area and 1.6 kms. run in the Sri Venkateswara Sanctuary. We had given permission for the survey alone. But it does not mean that the Andhra Pradesh Government has got the approval. First of all, Madam, as, we all know, lakhs of people visit the Tirumala hills, either on foot or by road, for the *darshan* of Lord Venkateswara. Taking into account the public needs—and it is site-specific—we gave permission only for undertaking a survey; but, beyond that, they have to prepare a project report and give an impact assessment. After the impact assessment is considered carefully, it has to go before the Indian Board of Wildlife, which the hon. Prime Minister is heading; after that, it has to get the nod from the Supreme Court, and then it come to the Ministry. It will properly scrutinise the project report. If the project is viable, if it is necessary, and if it is most essential, the approval will be given, under the Forest Conservation Act of 1980.

SHRI K. RAMA MOHANA RAO: Madam, the proposed rope-way would be the longest passenger rope-way in the world, and will handle 2,000 passengers per hour. As the House is aware, Tirupati is one of the famous tourist and religious destinations of the country. I would like to know from the hon. Minister whether it is true that the Supreme Court

[2 August, 2002]

RAJYA SABHA

had, on 14.2.2002, issued an order, restricting the State Government and other agencies from removing the dead, diseased, dying wind-fallen trees and other wastes from Sri Venkateswara and other wildlife sanctuaries. If it is true, does this not stand as a hurdle and would it not increase pollution in the national sanctuaries? If 'yes', how is the Ministry going to come out of this situation?

SHRI T.R. BAALU: Madam, on 14th February, 2002, on Writ Petition No. 202/1995, the Supreme Court, in its wisdom, had issued an Order. I quote, with you permission, Madam, a portion of the Order:

"We restrain respondent Nos. 2 to 32 from ordering the removal of dead, diseased, dying or wind-fallen trees, driftwood and grasses etc. from any National park of Game Sanctuary or forest."

The "forest" portion has been removed by them, by another order. This is part of the Order issued by the hon. Supreme Court. As of now, this is the law of the nation. We abide by the law of the nation, and there is no question of going beyond these Orders.

DR. T. SUBBARAMI REDDY: Madam, we all know that the Tirupati Temple is one of the most important temples in the country. A long time back, when I was the Chairman, I had raised the issue of rope-ways. Everybody, one lakh pilgrims visit the temple. They are finding it very difficult to have a *darshan* of the Lord. Because of the heavy rush, one has to stand in the queue for 18 hours! Now, the hon. Minister is saying that it is such a lengthy procedure. It may take them another ten years to get full permission from the Forest Ministry. I want him to pay special attention to it and take special interest in it. I also want him to minimise the procedure as a special case. I would like to know how much time he would take to do this. Simply saying that so many Departments are involved and so many surveys are involved will not give you the desired results. There should be coordination between the Ministries, and the Ministry of Environment and Forest and the State Government of Andhra Pradesh. He should see to it that we achieve this as early as possible.

Madam, the second point, though it is not relevant to this, is that, in Andhra Pradesh, in the districts of Visakhapatnam and East Godavari, lakhs of hectares of forest areas are available for coffee plantation, it seems under the conservation of forest Act, 1980, coffee plantation is

not permitted in the forest. The State Government has been requesting the Centre to permit coffee plantation. Are you going to permit it? When are you going to permit it?

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Is there coffee plantation in Thirumala? Not that I saw it.

SHRI T.N. CHATURVEDI: Madam, the hon. Member has himself said that it is not relevant.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: You can travel the whole country. The Railway Minister is there. But it doesn't allow me to do that. Mr. Minister, you answer the question relating to Thirumala.

SHRI T.R. BAALU: Madam, the hon. Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh had reminded me about it on 21st May, 2002. We had already cleared the case on the 7th of last month for reconnaissance survey. This itself shows how much praise and affection I have got for the people of Andhra Pradesh, just like Reddygaru.

Madam, as far as coffee plantation is concerned, I am sorry. As regards the first part- of his question. I said, "Yes". As regards the second part, I have to say a big "No", because as per the Forest Conservation Act, it is not possible for me to permit coffee plantation.

SHRIMATI S.G. INDIRA: Madam, I want to know from the hon. Minister—he is from Tamil Nadu—whether the Government has got any proposal to install a rope-way between Palani Hills and Kodaikanal Hills, which is just 8 kilometres. The distance by road is 63 kilometres. Kodaikanal is a tourist centre and Palani is a traditional pilgrim centre.

SHRI T.R. BAALU: Madam Deputy Chairperson, it is for the State Government to send the proposal for survey. As far as survey is concerned, we are giving clearance under the Forest Conservation Act. We are responsible for it. We have not received any proposal for survey from the State Government. Therefore, the question doesn't arise.

SHRI M.V. RAJASEKHARAN: Madam Deputy Chairperson, I would like to draw the attention of the hon. Minister, through you, Madam, to the fact that India is a country which has got a vast potential for eco-

[2 August, 2002]

RAJYA SABHA

tourism. Therefore, any development in the forest areas as well as of the tourist spots has to be done in coordination between the two Ministries, namely the Ministry of Environment and Forests and the Ministry of Tourism. Now, we have got a vast potential for eco-tourism in the States, particularly, in Karnataka. I would like to know, through you, Madam, from the Minister whether the Government has got any extensive plan to develop eco-tourism in this country. If it has got any plan, would the hon. Minister consider the inclusion of the State of Karnataka, which has got a vast potential. The forest area is full of eco-interest. Therefore, I would like to know from the hon. Minister whether the Government has got any plan, as far as the development of eco-tourism is concerned.

SHRI T.R. BAALU: Madam Deputy Chairperson, this is one of the thrust area of my Ministry. We, from the Ministry of Environment and Forests and the Ministry of Tourism, are interacting with each other. At the same time, I would like to inform the hon. Member that we have set up interpretation centres in the sanctuaries and national parks. For the time being, we are just educating the students, pilgrims and visitors through the interpretation centres. We will take up this project as early as possible.

***283. [Withdrawn]**

Battery Regenerator in the Railways

*284. DR. ARUN KUMAR SARMA: Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the use of Gionatex Battery Regenerator, to enhance the life of batteries, was approved by Research Design and Standards Organisation (RDSO) to prevent recurring loss to the Railways;

(b) if so, when and the implications thereof;

(c) the details regarding its impact on life of batteries and the estimated annual financial gain on its introduction to the Railways;

(d) the time to be taken for actual implementation and the target fixed to do so;