

Tourist Resort in Majuli island of Assam

*343. DR. ARUN KUMAR SARMA : Will the Minister of TOURISM be pleased to state :

(a) whether a proposal for the creation of a tourist resort in Majuli Island of Assam was received by the Ministry;

(b) if so, the date of receipt of proposal, date of sanction, commissioning schedule, total outlay, amount allocated, amount utilized and progress made so far;

(c) whether a feasibility report in regard to preparation of a comprehensive tourist package for Majuli including tourist lodge has so far been submitted;

(d) if so, the details thereof, and

(e) if not, the reasons, for delay, target fixed and agency entrusted for the purpose ?

THE MINISTER OF TOURISM AND MINISTER OF CULTURE (SHRI ANANTH KUMAR) : (a) to (e) A Statement is laid on the Table of the House.

STATEMENT

Tourist Resort in Majuli Island of Assam

(a) to (e) Project report on heritage and eco-tourism resort at Majuli in Assam was received in June, 1997. However, since there was no assessment of carrying capacity and detailed socio-economic study, site-selection, information regarding competitive quotations, etc. the State Government was advised to do a feasibility study.

The Ministry of Tourism received the proposal from the State Govt. of Assam for the prioritised scheme of preparation of feasibility study for tourist facilities at Garamur Majuli on 24-01-2000. The project has been sanctioned for an amount of Rs. 5.00 lakhs on 10-4-2000. The State Government has entrusted Assam Tourism Development Corporation to carry out the feasibility study.

DR. ARUN KUMAR SARMA : Mr. Chairman, Sir, the Majuli island of Assam is the largest fresh-water river island in the world. It has drawn considerable attention. Recently, after the ban was lifted on the visit of foreign tourists, more than 500 foreign tourists visited the island. But the lodging facilities for the tourists are very poor in the island. The necessity of lodging facilities for the tourists is urgently felt. The reply of the hon. Minister itself has indicated that there was lack of sincerity, both on the part of Central

Government and the State Government, for early commissioning of the Tourist Resort Project. As per my information, the Government of Assam was initially asked to give a Detailed Project Report. Subsequently, the feasibility report was asked for. Whatever may be the report, I thank the Ministry for sanctioning, though after a lapse of three years, Rs. 5 lakhs for the feasibility work. Now, I would like to know from the hon. Minister whether he would assure the House that the feasibility report will be completed within a specific time frame and the project will be sanctioned within the current financial year.

SHRI ANANTH KUMAR : Sir, on 3rd June, the State Government of Assam had submitted a proposal for the feasibility report. But when they submitted it there were no points of reference. Therefore, we asked for the points of reference and later they submitted another proposal for a feasibility report. In that, there was no mention of rate of contracts. Therefore, again we requested for that. Now, they have submitted a fresh proposal which is, by and large, complete. I am glad to inform the House that on 10th April, 2000 we have sanctioned Rs. 5 lakhs for a feasibility study of the heritage and echo tourism resort at Majuli. Sir, it is up to the State Government to expedite the feasibility report. But I will assure the hon. members that we will be writing to the Government of Assam to finish the feasibility report within three months and send us a project prioritising it so that we can take it up and once we sanction it we can complete that thing within 13 months in Majuli.

DR. ARUN KUMAR SARMA : Sir, the second part of my supplementary is that on 19th January, 2000, the Ministry of Environment and Forests has recommended to UNESCO to declare Majuli as a world heritage site, both from the cultural point of view and also on the basis of national heritage it attains. Now, considering this importance, will the hon. Minister assure this House that adequate publicity material will be produced, including the making of a documentary film on the Island so that proper attention about the rich cultural and natural heritage of the Island is shown? Also I want to know from the hon. Minister whether Majuli could be included in the tourism network of the Government of India.

SHRI ANANTH KUMAR : Sir, the thing is that Majuli Island is world's largest river island located 12 Kms. off Jorhat. It is very famous for satra culture and there are more than 665 satras in Assam, and more than 50 are situated in Majuli Island only. The Government of India is interested in developing it as one of the heritage sites and if at all it is developed as we have proposed, it will be the first-ever environmental heritage site to be developed

so. Therefore, not only the Government of Assam has submitted a preliminary proposal for the development of Majuli Island to the extent of Rs. 3.95 crores, secondly, even the Ministry of Environment and Forests has recommended it for the UNESCO to declare it as a world heritage site. I will be assuring this House as well as the hon. Members that we will be more than pleased to recommend to the Department of Tourism to include it in the list of tourist resorts in the same way.

DR. MANMOHAN SINGH : Mr. Chairman, Sir, Assam is a very under-developed State when it comes to the development of its tourism potential. I do believe the tourism offers immense scope for creating new employment opportunities. In this context, I would like to know from the hon. Minister as to whether he will cooperate with the Assam Government in working out an integrated plan for the development of tourism in the State of Assam as a whole.

SHRI ANANTH KUMAR : Sir, I am happy to inform the hon. senior colleague of mine that this year the Ministry of Tourism has allocated Rs. 3.32 crores for 14 projects in Assam only. To give a hindsight, in the entire 8th Plan, only Rs. 4.39 crores was allocated for the development of tourism by the Union Government. But in the last three years, 1997-98, 1998-99 and 1999-2000, Rs. 19.98 crores, i.e., almost Rs. 20 crores were allocated to Assam for the development of tourism. In the five years of the 8th Plan, it was only Rs. 4.39 crores, but in the last three years, it has been nearly Rs. 20 crores. I agree with the hon. Member that there is a tremendous potentiality for the development of tourism, and we are at it.

DR. (SMT.) JOYASREE GOSWAMI MAHANTA : Sir, I am happy that the hon. Minister has already agreed that there is a large potential for the development of Majuli as a tourist spot. But, Sir, I would like to know whether there is any plan to develop it as a tourist spot; whether the Government thinks that the place has got proper importance as a tourist spot. I would also like to know whether there is any plan to set up an institution for tourism so that the unemployed youth there can be employed as tourist managers and guides.

SHRI ANANTH KUMAR : Sir, the State Government has submitted a proposal to us for approach campus at Niamati Ghat on the southern bank of the Brahmaputra at a cost of Rs. 42.3 lakhs and a farm house at Darbar Chapari, creation of a memorial, a heritage village with all the details to the tune of Rs. 57.28 lakhs and a prime centre at Darmor with transportation facilities and the Darmor tourist resort with modern facilities, including conference

hall and exhibition-hall with museum and games at a cost of Rs. 1.52 crores, and a sports complex at Lohit Ghat at Rs. 14.77 lakhs, viewing points and meditation centres at places, including transit camps at Rs. 74 lakhs. For all these things they need to go in for a detailed feasibility study. The feasibility study has already been sanctioned by the Government of India. Once they come out with the detailed feasibility report, we would take a view about it.

WELCOME TO SOUTH ASIA DELEGATION OF EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

MR. CHAIRMAN : Hon. Members, I have an announcement to make.

We have with us, seated in the Special Box, Members of the South Asia delegation of the European Parliament, currently on a visit to our country under the distinguished leadership of His Excellency Mr. Gerard Collins, Chairman of the South Asia delegation of the European Parliament.

On behalf of the Members of the House and on my own behalf, I take pleasure in extending a hearty welcome to the leader and other members of the delegation and wish our distinguished guests an enjoyable and fruitful stay in our country. We hope that during their stay here they would be able to see and learn more about our Parliamentary system, our country and our people and that their visit to this country will further strengthen the friendly bonds that exist between India and the European Union. Through them we convey our greetings and best wishes to the European Union.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS—Contd.

SHRI C. APOK JAMIR : Sir, it is known fact that the North-East region has been reeling under a lot of financial difficulties. At the same time, being an insurgency-zone, development had not taken place in the manner anticipated. Since tourism is a potential area which needs to be addressed in a more effective manner—and to a larger extent we feel that this is an area where the economy of the area also can be enhanced,—I would like to know through you, Sir, from the hon. Minister what steps are being taken to realise the potential in this region. At the same time, in Nagaland, in my State, where the cease-fire agreement has been made with the insurgent groups and where recently there have been positive signs from the other insurgency groups, I would like to know from the hon. Minister also, in these prevailing conditions, what are the positive steps that are being taken, especially in the State of Nagaland as far as tourism is concerned.

SHRI ANNATH KUMAR : Mr. Chairman, Sir this does not arise from the main question, yet I want to inform the hon. Member that North-east is a priority area. I will be more than willing to sit with the hon. member and discuss with him about tourism development in Nagaland.

SHRI DRUPAD BORGOHAIN : Mr. Chairman, Sir, I think the money allotted for the development of tourism in Assam is very, very little. Assam is very rich in Natural beauty that comprises of green forests, blue hills, beautiful rivers, rare wild animals, birds, etc. Moreover, it is rich in historical monuments of the Ahoms, Kachari, Chutia and other kingdoms in Kachar district, Sibsagar district, Jorhat district and many other districts. There are some important points like the Majuli island and some other spots also. But these are not being developed properly. There is no proper infrastructure. There are no roads. There are no bungalows so that the tourists can stay there. These difficulties are there. I think the amount which has been announced by the Minister is very little. Will the Minister be kind enough to take pains to develop the tourist industry there properly by providing infrastructure and roads? Will he help the State of Assam? That is my question.

SHRI ANANTH KUMAR : Mr. Chairman, Sir, I entirely agree with the hon. Member. The thing is, total tourism development of the country requires an allocation of Rs. 48,000 crores which should be pooled by public and private industries, by the Central Government and by the various State Governments. The Plan allocation for this year is Rs. 135 crores. In that Rs. 135 crores, this much has been shown against the North-east. *(Interruptions)*... I am informing the House about the real fact. The thing is, though there is hardly Rs. 500 crores as Plan allocation for tourism by the Union Government and by all the State Governments, put together, the total foreign exchange earned is Rs. 12,548 crores. This is the third largest foreign exchange earner. Therefore, if there is a concerted effort on getting this Rs. 48,000 crores, at least, in the next Plan period, then, I think, more allocation can be done to Assam also.

Recovery of Outstanding Dues from Sahara Airlines

* 344. SHRI RAJNATH SINGH 'SURYA' : Will the Minister of CIVIL AVIATION be pleased to state:—

- (a) whether there are some outstanding payments to be made to Government or to the AAI by the Sahara Airlines;
- (b) if so, the details thereof; and
- (c) the action taken/proposed to be taken for delay in these payments against Sahara Airlines?