

Member and, I think, he is speaking for the first time.

Need to revive the economy of Darjeeling

SHRI RATNA BAHADUR RAI (West Bengal); Madam, first of all I thank the House for giving me the permission to call the attention of this House to the situation presently prevailing in Darjeeling.

It is a great privilege for me to be among this galaxy of Elders of Indian Parliament and deliver my maiden address. Madam, perhaps, you are aware that Darjeeling is a unique tourist spot which is famous for its boundless scenic beauty and tranquility and which later on turned into a troubled Shangrila spot due to the GNLFF agitation for three years. The whole situation in that period has turned into a nightmare and the whole Hill Polity pad reeled under a bloody trail of events. Thanks to the patience and perseverance shown to the State Government and the Central Government for having protracted negotiations with the GNLFF, which concluded last year on the 22nd August with a tri-partite agreement. It was a great achievement of historical significance not only for Darjeeling or Bengal but for the "whole nation.

Now an elected Hill Council has started functioning there. In the beginning, to negotiate with the GNLFF and to get rid of that bloody imbroglio was like baying at the moon. But, later on, with the good gestures shown by the State Government and the Central Government, which prevailed upon the GNLFF the people there heaved a sigh of relief now.

Madam, it is my humble submission that for the successful implementation of the Darjeeling Accord, both in letter and spirit a constructive and positive attitude on the part of all concerned is imperative. Above all the Central Government and the State Governments should evolve a well-planned strategy for the development of Darjeeling.

Madam, Mr. Subhash Ghising, Chairman of the Darjeeling Hill Council has reportedly asked the State Government for the grant of Rs. 260 crores for the overall development of Darjeeling. Undoubtedly, during the troubled times- properties worth more than Rs. 150 crores have been destroyed there. The total hill economy was brought to a grinding halt. It is a herculean task for the State Government alone to shoulder this responsibility and I want to request the Central Government, through you, to come forward with its heart and hand and offer a lions share.

Madam, now the situation in Darjeeling is improving and normalcy is returning. It is letting its down rays of peace to caress the majestic heights of Kanchenjunga. Tourist from inland and abroad are visiting Darjeeling and pushing the season to a boom. In this connection, I would like to request the Central Government to promote tourism in Darjeeling in a big way. For this, I would request to provide special assistance for tourism in Darjeeling, remove restrictions imposed on foreign tourists and explore a place for Darjeeling in the tourist map of the country. I think this will help us in two ways. On the one hand, unemployed youths will get employment and, on the other, it will strengthen the bond of brotherhood of Darjeeling people with the people of other places and social groups which will certainly advance our cherished cause of communal amity and national integrity. Finally, I urge upon the Central Government to come forward to extend its helping hand to the State Government of West Bengal to make the Darjeeling Accord a success and set up a glaring example of solving a violent ethnic conflagration in a democratic and peaceful way. - -

Madam, I again thank my elders for their patient hearing and the Chair for permission.

THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN: Thank you.