

- II. Notification No. 138/2009-Customs, dated 11.12.2009 seeking to provide exemption from Education/Secondary and Higher Education Cess to Brownfield expansion projects of mega power projects.
- III. Notification No. 139/2009-Customs, dated 11.12.2009 seeking to provide exemption from 4% additional duty of customs to Brownfield expansion projects of mega power projects.

PRIVATE MEMBER'S RESOLUTIONS

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (PROF. P. J. KURIEN): Now, we shall take up further discussion on the Resolution regarding all round development of State of Sikkim moved by Shri O.T. Lepcha on 26th November, 2009. Mr. Ahluwalia to continue.

Need to prepare an action plan for allround development of Sikkim

SHRI S.S. AHLUWALIA (Jharkhand): Sir, I just started on that day. I spoke only for half-a-minute on that day.

Sir, I was speaking on 26th November on the Private Member Resolution of Shri O.T. Lepcha regarding all round development of Sikkim.

Sir, this beautiful State was created on 26th April, 1975 by virtue of Thirty-sixth Constitution Amendment of 1975 and this became the 22nd State of the Indian Union.

Sir, it is a fact that it is a land-locked State. They don't have a port; they don't have enough roadways; they are linked through one NH 31 A; and on its one side is Bhutan, one side is Nepal and one side is China. On the other side, of course, it is their motherland, India. Due to all that, there are lot of problems in its economic development. Although they are doing a very fine job in floriculture, medicinal plants, alternate resources of medicine, and there are good tourist centres and places of pilgrimage, everything depends on basic infrastructure, that is, road connectivity, air link and road link. They do not have a rail link and they do not have enough road link. They do not have an airport; they have only helipads. I think, they have constructed an airport but private airlines are not allowed to function there. So, under such circumstances, this beautiful State is trying to survive. My hon. friend and learned Member of this House, Shri O.T. Lepcha, tried to draw the attention of the House, and through the House, that of the Government, to take certain measures.

Sir, sometimes, when I think about Sikkim, the beautiful State, it reminds me of the old couplet written by Firdaus, "गर फ़िर्दौस बर रुए ज़मीं अस्त, हमीं अस्त, हमीं अस्त, हमीं अस्त।" One wonders whether it was written for Kashmir, Darjeeling or Sikkim; it is such a beautiful State. Still, it is out of

reach for the common people. If proper infrastructure is provided, the State can develop and flourish; poverty of the local people can go; literacy percentage can grow higher, even though their literacy percentage is good. But they are now dependent on certain things. Now, whether it is famous or infamous, there is the online lottery; it is from Sikkim. The Manipal University went to Sikkim. But proper infrastructure is not there. Outsiders cannot go there. These problems are there. So, they are handicapped.

Talking of development of the border areas, Sir, there are some good places. I am a devotee of Guru Nanak. There is a place situated at a height of more than 7500 feet, known as Gurudangmar 'to' it can be located on the map. 'Dang' means *lathi*; 'tso' means water body. There were glaciers there. Guru Nanak went there. He is known as Nanak Lama there, not as Guru Nanak of the Sikhs, but Nanak Lama of the Buddhists. Nanak is known as a Buddhist saint there. He went there. He had broken the glacier with his *lathi* and water came out. You would be surprised to know that even at that height, water is not frozen; it is not ice. Even military vehicles are using that water for their radiators. People of that area consider that water holy; it is nectar for them. There is a small *gurudwara* constructed by the Army people. People go there, worship and come back; you cannot stay there. Then, there are many other Buddhist temples and people pass through difficult routes to reach them. If you can provide good infrastructure, many more people can go there and pay their respects.

Sir, prior to becoming the 22nd State of the Indian Union, there were certain provisions provided to the citizens of that State where even a non-Sikkimese, I mean biologically he is not a Sikkimese but of Indian origin, can do everything whatever is allowed under Articles 14, 15 and 16 of the Indian Constitution. But after this State was created, the Union Government, in exercise of its power under Section 7 of the Citizenship Act, 1955, Citizenship Order, 1975 conferred Indian citizenship on every person who immediately before the 26th day of April, 1975 was a Sikkim subject under the Sikkim Subject Regulation, 1961, but ignored to deal with the fate of those Indian nationals who were residents of Sikkim prior to the appointed date, that is, 26th April, 1975. As a result of such negligence on the part of the Union Government about the necessity of protecting the status of those Indian nationals who had been residing in Sikkim prior to its merger in India but did not comprise Sikkim subjects, these Indian national residents of Sikkim are being treated virtually as second-class citizens in Sikkim State for no fault of theirs. So, the Citizenship Order has denied their right to stay. How many people are there? There are only 400 families and they are residing in that area for centuries together. Their forefathers were born there; they are doing small business. But under this Order, they were denied everything. To make things worse for these Indian nationals, who are estimated to be comprising about 400 families and their descendents who have been residing in Sikkim for generations since pre-Independence days, Notification No.26030/69/88 ICI, dated 20th March, 1989 was issued by the Government of India and a subsequent Notification No. 66/Home/95,

dated 22nd November, 1995 was issued by the Government of Sikkim by dint of which all fundamental rights, of citizens enshrined in Articles 14, 15 and 16 in particular in the Constitution of India, except the right to franchise, are being grossly denied to these *bona fide* Indian nationals residing in Sikkim. Sir, you have made it a State under the Indian Constitution. You amended the Constitution and then you made it the 22nd State of the Union. Those who were non-Sikkimese, their population is very less; they are all Indian people. They were living there but they were denied all their rights. Sitting here in Delhi - - both the Home Ministry and the Finance Ministry are sitting at the North Block - they cannot see the problems in Gangtok. One can say that they don't have infrastructure, they don't have roads, air connectivity, rail connectivity and that is why our officials are unable to see their problems and hear their grievance, or anything else. What is the problem? Though the Indian nationals in Sikkim do enjoy the exercise of their rights and exercise the political rights and freedom since the first General Elections to the Legislative Assembly held on 12th October, 1979, all such Indian nationals who had their hearth and home in Sikkim prior to April 26, 1975 have been denied all socio-economic and political rights by the State through a series of legislative measures. We are proud of our judiciary. We are proud of our Constitution. We are proud of our justice system. We are proud of our grievance-redressal system in the country. But why are these 400 families suffering under the dome of democracy, where we can say proudly that the Indian politics or Indian democracy is better than the others; the Indian Constitution is better than the others. We speak about equal rights for everybody.

Sir, prior to merger with the Indian Republic as the 22nd State on April 26, 1975, the bilateral relationship between India and Sikkim used to be governed by the Indo-Sikkim Treaty of 1950 under which Sikkim was conferred the status of Himalayan protectorate of India whereby Persons of Indian Origin (PIO) residing in Sikkim were accorded the freedom of choice to reside, carry out lawful occupation including trade and commerce, and, they were eligible to enjoy all the rights and privileges including employment under the local administration.

Section 5(1)(b) of the Citizenship Act, 1955 provided for dealing with such Indian nationals who were residents of Sikkim prior to 26th April, 1975. What happened after 26th of April, 1975? Why were these rights snatched from these people? Why? How can a natural born citizen of India be treated as second-class citizen in his own land of birth, which is now Sikkim, a part of India for over thirty three years. This legal anomaly requires a judicious analysis and treatment by the Central Government which alone is the competent authority to determine and decide upon the claims of citizenship of India. Sir, according to our Citizenship Act, with regard to the identification, by features, you can make out whether he is a man of Indian Origin or not. But a Person of Indian Origin is denied his rights in his own land. Sir, by virtue of being *bonafide* Indian nationals settled in Sikkim since decades, their claims should have been settled first by an authoritative, unambiguous order or notification of the Union Government and the same ought to have been given due publicity.

The notification issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India bearing no. S.O.214E, and S.O.216E, reproduced and printed in the Sikkim Government Gazette no. 11 dated 21st June, 1975 have failed to confer the socio-economic and political rights to the Indian nationals settled in Sikkim. The discrimination has become pronounced over the past 33 years and is in violation of Right to Equality, guaranteed in the Constitution of India.

Sir, the nature of discrimination against the Indian nationals settled in Sikkim prior to April 26, 1975 has been further aggravated owing to the amendment effected by the Parliament of India in the Income Tax Act, 1961 *vide* the Finance Act, 2008. Section 10 of the Indian Income Tax Act, 1961, as amended by the Finance Act, 2008, introduced clause 26AAA, and, has exempted the Sikkimese, the Sikkim Subject holders from the payment of Income Tax.

So, now, Sir, there is a register. Only the Sikkim subject matter can be registered in that, not these 400 families. Their families and their descendents cannot enter their names in that register; only the Sikkim subject can be registered there. Now, they are getting the benefit out of this exemption notice that they are exempted from paying income tax. Whereas these 400 families are concerned, whatever they earn, whatever they produce, whatever they sell, they have to pay income tax. It looks really amazing that under the same Constitution, the India works from Kashmir to Kanyakumari and from Kutch to Kohima and in between it is Sikkim, which is the only State where they are exempted, the only State. Why?

Sir, the Indian nationals residing in Sikkim, prior to April 26, 1975, have been kept out of the ambit of section 26AAA as they had for all along been Indian nationals. On the other hand, 73,431 persons, who were neither subject holder nor Indian citizens were conferred Indian citizenship *vide* Union Government notification number 26030/69/88 I.C.I., dated 20th March 1989. Consequently, these persons have been treated Sikkimese and hence granted exemption under section 26AAA by virtue of above order, and order of even number dated 8th April, 1991, Sikkim subjected nomenclature becomes unconstitutional after 26th April, 1975 when Sikkim joined the Union of India as its constituent unit in Schedule I of the Constitution.

Sir, the other thing is that those who are from Nepal, those who are from Bhutan, those who are from Tibbet, those who are Lepchas, those who are not resident of that area but looks like same, they can register. But a person of Indian origin, his features are different, his looks are different, although they also speak the local language or the Sikkimesee are also speaking Hindi, the language is not a barrier

SHRI B.K. HARIPARASAD (Karnataka): There are three races in the Indian origin, the Aryans, the Dravidians and the Mongolians. They all are Indians.

SHRI S.S. AHLUWALIA: I am grateful to my learned friend, Mr. Hariprasadji, who has just reminded me about this. I did not want to say that they are Mongol origin.

SHRI B.K. HARIPARASAD: It is a race. The Aryan race, the Dravidian race and the Mongolian race.

SHRI S.S. AHLUWALIA: I never wanted to raise the issue of race because I don't want to fight in between. It is between the Aryans or Dravidians or Mongolians because I know the consequences also. There is Mongolian agitation going on in the country to make a separate nation from Chindwin Valley to Chittagong Hill Tracts. I don't want to give popularity to that. This may be a design of that part. That is not the point. The point is, I am talking about Indian origin. Indian origin means right from Kashmir to Kanyakumari and from Kutch to Kohima. That is my plea. I knew that point but I did not want to raise that.

Sir, I support whatever my friend, O.T. Lepcha, said; I support his stand because it is the NDA Government which brought a separate Department for North East development in the Home Ministry, and a Minister is also designated for that. Mr. Handique, now the Minister, belongs to Jorhat in the North East. He will understand the problems of North East. The problems of Sikkim should be addressed in the North East Council and their dues, I mean, whatever they demand for development of their infrastructure should be considered.

While supporting the Resolution, I support the demands of 400 families of Indian origin, those who are living in Sikkim and denied their rights under Articles 14, 15, and 19 of the Indian Constitution. They should be given their due rights. I would like to make a prayer here.

One, the Government be directed to ensure executive action with a view to treat all such Indian citizens and their descendents residing in Sikkim prior to 26th April 1975 as Sikkimese Indians for the purpose of automatically becoming eligible to all the socio-economic and political rights on a par with those of the erstwhile Sikkim subjects while availing of such rights and benefits from the Governments at the Centre as well as the State in the interest of justice, equality and welfare of its citizens.

Two, the Government be directed to ensure equity before the law by removing the discrimination arising from the amendment of the Income Tax Act 1961 *vide* the Finance Act 2008 as narrated by me earlier. This is the Section 26AAA which exempted Sikkimese subject matters from payment of Income Tax. They should also get this benefit.

With these words, I support the Resolution. Thank you.

DR. E.M. SUDARSANA NATCHIAPPAN (Tamil Nadu): Sir, I could see the Resolution which actually exposes whatever feelings the Sikkimese are having in their heart. At the same time, we have

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to remember how our democratic system worked so well. It was during the tenure of Shrimati Indira Gandhi that this State was added to our country. We can even say it a new nation. It voluntarily came into the fold of the Indian Union. Except this State, all the States were in existence at the time of Independence in 1947 and also when the Constitution was drafted. This was the new rich land which came to India. We are very proud of the 36th Amendment of the Constitution which annexed Sikkim as part of India. It was a very strategically placed country. Now it is part of our nation. It is a very beautiful State. We are also very proud that it is a very peaceful and peace-loving State. Buddhists are living there in large numbers. The beauty of this place is seen not just by every Indian but by every human being in the world.

Sir, I would like to stress only on two points in this matter. One is, we have to gear up our own administration to find out who are our citizens and how many people are in India who have to be catered by our own administration. I raised two questions through Unstarred Question. One was: 'How many people were given employment visa from various countries more so from China and other neighbourhood countries?' The reply given by the Ministry of Home Affairs was: 'We don't have any compiled information at the Centre, Another question was: 'How many foreign refugees are in India?

How many were under the supervision of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees? How many of them have asked for the citizenship? How the Government is considering it? The reply given was, "We don't have any data at the Centre." Sir, I am very surprised that we cannot understand how many people are in our country on the basis of the visas at the national level-we could not even have the data - and if we could not find out as to how many people have come legally as refugees and settled in India. We are allowing them and spending huge money for their welfare. Also, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees is also looking after them and reporting to the United Nations then and there. If we can't even have the figures at the national level, how are we managing our development activities? Crores of people are in India without our own calculations. How our Planning Commission can work and allocate funds to various States? How are we going to look after their health and education? How are we going to utilise their human resource? Sir, it is high time that we found out a way or brought forward an enactment for identifying the clear-cut number of persons who are in India and how are we going to manage them. On all our borders on four sides, whether it is sea route or land route, everything is poor. Anybody can come in India. More so, all intellectuals are going out of India, settling in Western countries and getting Nobel Prize. But, all unnecessary people are pushed towards India and we are bearing all the costs. Therefore, we have to come forward with a debate on this issue and see that we have a system for clear-cut identification of Indian citizens. Even if a single person enters into the territory of India, he should be known to the Government of India. They should have a system like that. They have got a lot of

electronic systems. Even if a bird or animal enters into the Indian boundary, that should be known to the Government of India. Then only, we would be safe. We should have this system of identification of persons who are repatriates, who are illegally coming inside the country, who are legally coming inside, when are they returning back, how many days they are going to live and enjoy our system, development, money and resources, etc. If we cannot know that, we are very much in the backwardness. Sir, I want to focus upon this Sikkim issue. Our friend, Shri Ahluwalia, very correctly drew attention of the House and also the Government regarding how Persons of Indian Origin could not get the recognition as citizen there while all others were recognised by a simple executive notification. Therefore, everything is to be properly done to make our legal system perfect so that our system is obeyed by any person who enters into Indian territory. Sir, every country where I got the opportunity of going, thanks to Shrimati Sonia Gandhiji who sent me as a delegate, they have a clear-cut number of citizens and non-citizens. That is why, their planning is excellent and they have made their security perfect.

Sir, secondly, I would like to stress that Sikkim is one State which we can proudly say that the whole humanity would like to come and stay there and enjoy the nature and go back. Such are the tourist spots! How much have we developed? How much money have we spent for tourism? Is there any national plan? Is there any plan by the State? Whether it is properly executed. How much are we earning every year through that planning? Are we having that type of thinking now? When the world becomes a village, we are part of that village and we have to see that our citizens get all the facilities. Similarly, we have to earn through the international monetary system. It is not the industry alone which is important now. It is the service industry which is much more important where already, the nature has given all facilities, but the only thing is, we have to protect the nature and, at the same time, we have to meet the minimum requirement of infrastructure development so that any person who comes to Sikkim could be in a position to return back the same day or the next day, at least. Even the air route is insufficient and the rail route is not at all thought of. Such is the situation. Therefore, we have to, at least, think of expanding the air route. That should be the position. And international tourism should also be developed so that we can earn huge money through that.

The citizens of Sikkim are having all intellectual powers and resources. Those resources are our nation's resources. Therefore, they should be allowed to have their own persons throughout India and, more specifically, to occupy the higher posts. There was one part of the request made in this Resolution; I am reading the seventh point - "There is no representation of the people of Sikkim in high Constitutional posts and other higher authorities." This thing has to be looked into and the persons who are coming from Sikkim should be involved at the national level. They should occupy different positions which are accepted by the Constitution.

Thank you, Sir.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (PROF. P. J. KURIEN): Thank you, Natchiappanji. Now, Dr. Janardhan Waghmare,

DR. JANARDHAN WAGHMARE (Maharashtra): Thank you, Sir. Now this Resolution is meant for development of Sikkim. The historical background is given here by Ahluwaliaji. He has talked about its historical background, its culture and heritage, its resources and the natural beauty of this place.

Sikkim has emerged in Indian territory in 1975. Even after 35 years, no development has taken place; very little. There are no railway lines; there is no airport; there is no university, and the State does not have any infrastructure facilities there! Roads are, in fact, blood vessels of a particular region. Without that, there cannot be any communication, no connectivity with the world, and no development takes place. Therefore, the demand in this Resolution is that there should be roads. The National Highway runs from that particular State but it is in a very bad condition. So, we have to look into it. In fact, it is called a "Mini Switzerland" and the beauty of this place is just like a Heaven as has been prescribed just now. This could be a very big tourist destination which can give a lot of money and income to us. Now, the development of this region is important from two points of view. Development is needed for the welfare of the people living there in Sikkim itself. And development is necessary for national integration also. The Sikkim people have merged with India with the hope that their aspirations will be fulfilled and they will have no discontentment in their mind.

Sir, there are many parts in this country which are backward, economically and socially. In developed States like Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh, and even in U.P., backward places are neglected, for instance, Marathwada in Maharashtra, Telangana in Andhra Pradesh and Bundelkhand in U.P. So, there is no plan, no roadmap for weaker sections of the society, for backward sections of the society. You have certain Constitutional provisions. But what about the backward regions? So, they should be meted out socio-economic justice. The principle of equality should be followed. Otherwise, these places will be neglected. They will again become backward and, therefore, they will have discontentment, as Telangana is having. Such places will have discontentment. Therefore, now we have to consider the aspirations of the people there. Why don't we establish one Central University in Sikkim? We are establishing universities. Every State is getting one. Even though Sikkim is a small State, it requires a Central University. Unless you have higher education and advanced higher education with excellence, people can't get good services also. For appointing people in high positions in Government, higher education is needed. Therefore, I would like to say, let us establish a Central University there. At least, one airport with all good facilities is needed in that particular part.

The region has to be developed with its own resources. There are abundant resources in

Sikkim. But we have to just implement our own plans properly. Then only will Sikkim have good and proper development. Development is the key word. We have to look into these things. With these words, I support this Resolution. Thank you.

DR. GYAN PRAKASH PILANIA (Rajasthan): Thank you, Mr. Vice-Chairman, Sir. I rise to support the Resolution. I am afraid, we strayed into certain other related issues primarily regarding citizenship. The plea of Shri Lepcha was primarily for special aid for development, more care and more total inclusive growth for the land-locked Sikkim.

Regarding citizenship, certain vital issues have been raised. So, I just speak for a minute about it, with your permission. Firstly, as has been pointed out, citizenship must be accounted for and properly marked, and India must know who Indian citizens are and who are not. There is confusion even now about it. What is the total strength? How many of them have come to India across the border unauthorisedly? How many of them are staying here? They are people who are natural hazards and who are hazards for the security, integrity and sovereignty of the nation.. Maybe, they are Bangladeshis; maybe, they are Pakistanis; maybe, they are from many other places. If they are not Indians, they should be marked as "not Indians" and if they are Indians, they should be categorised as Indian citizens. Shri Natchiappan has pointed out this issue.

Another issue which has been pointed out by Shri S.S. Ahluwalia is pertaining to the plight of Indian-born, Indian-origin, people. A handful of 400 families, unfortunately, due to oversight by the administrative authorities or by the Government of India or whatever you call it, had been left high and dry and cut-off. They don't have socio-economic-political right as a citizen which they should get. So, I think a very validly argued out case has been put forward in a historical perspective. It has touched, perhaps, the heart of everyone present here and, I think, the Government will, through you, Sir, take proper notice of it and do the needful at the earliest. A kind of misery has been perpetuated on those unfortunate 400 families. We must come to their rescue.

As far as the Resolution of Mr. Lepcha is concerned, we should consider Sikkim as an Indian sovereign State which, voluntarily, merged into the Indian Union. It was a great gesture of neighbourhood, friendship and goodwill, and we must take special care of the person, of the entity, of the earlier State which merged with the Indian Union and became one of its part. And it must share total inclusive growth which India is enjoying. Its health issue has to be taken care of; its education issue has to be taken care of; its housing issue has to be taken care of; its road connectivity, its air connectivity, its rail connectivity and its teledensity, all these have to be taken care of. We have to see how the infant mortality rate, in Sikkim is, and how their maternal mortality rate is. All these should be looked into and compared with other progressive States of the Union of India. And, if they are lagging behind, we should go some extra miles with a view to helping this State. It is a landlocked

State. But it is a very strategic State for us because it has its borders, as pointed out earlier, with Nepal, Bhutan and China. It is an international border. It needs very special security. It needs very special watch. It needs very special care. That can happen only when economic development takes place properly and rightly in Sikkim. So, the first plea and the real plea for Sikkim will be, how to make it forward in the sphere of development. And, as very rightly pointed out, roads are arteries of growth, and if there is no connectivity, if there is no civil airport, very great potential, immense potential, of international tourism cannot be exploited. So, the first and foremost need will be the connectivity. The education needs must be catered to. It may not be possible to establish a university there because of very less population and because of certain other constraints. But, at least, a college of eminence, as the centre of learning, must be there, worth its name, in Sikkim. It is high time this is looked into. We may call it a 'mini-Switzerland'; we may call it a 'heaven on the Earth', or, that it is 'another Kashmir'. There is no doubt that as far as the gift of Nature is concerned, God has been, abundantly, kind to Sikkim. Unkindness has come from we people only. And, Sikkim, legitimately, looks forward to its brethren in other States of the country that they will extend a hand of friendship, goodwill and good faith. This would inculcate a feeling amongst the people of Sikkim that 'all is for one and one is for all'. That kind of a feeling must be created. It will be the basis of national integration, as has been pointed out by my colleagues here. An all-round development will be required. Infrastructure is, at present, at an infant stage in that part of the country. The Special Category Status has been given only because it is a hilly and a difficult terrain; it has low population density; it has strategic location along borders with neighbouring countries; there is backwardness in infrastructure. All these things justify the Resolution of Mr. Lepcha that a special treatment should be given to Sikkim.

I know generosity of this great land, known as India; it has never been unfair to its own people and Sikkim is its part and parcel. So, I again plead that apart from giving legitimate right of citizenship to those who have been left out from the mainstream, a few extra steps should be taken by the Government of India to give a kind of thrust to development activities so that Sikkim can enjoy all benefits of inclusive growth, and Sikkim can legitimately feel that it was a right decision in 1975 that it voluntarily merged into the Indian Union. Thank you very much, Sir, for bearing patiently with me.

THE MINISTER OF MINES AND THE MINISTER OF DEVELOPMENT OF NORTH EASTERN REGION (SHRI B.K. HANDIQUE): Mr. Vice-Chairman, Sir, I have heard the concerns of the hon. Members of the House for the development of the State of Sikkim. Broadly, the issues are; socio-economic development, connectivity and tourism. It will be my endeavour, Sir, through this reply, to

allay the apprehensions raised in the House by the hon. Members. I assure the hon. Members that Sikkim will see development within a couple of years. As a matter of fact, projects mentioned in the hon. Members speeches are now well under way. Before I dwell on the subject, I place before the House a remark made by the hon. Chief Minister of Sikkim on 5th December, 2005. In reply to a query of the newspaper *Hindu*, in a interview, on the occasion of his twelfth year in office, he said, I quote, "It is regrettable that Sikkim is the only State in the country where there is no airport, no rail link and university, even though it is the declared Government norm that every full-fledged State of India must have these facilities." Sir, that was the year 2005, the second year, just the second year of the first UPA Government led by Congress after long eight years. All these projects mentioned by the hon. Members and also mentioned by the Sikkim Chief Minister were all launched and had taken off during the first tenure of the UPA Government. And fresh proposals with substantial dose of funds are in the pipeline, during the first six months of the UPA Government's second tenure. I think, you can trust us. We are committed to bring in development to make Sikkim a modern developed State. We still remember the late Prime Minister, Smt. Indira Gandhi, when she declared with throbbing emotion to the people of Sikkim on the historic occasion of Rashtrapati's assent to the Constitution (Amendment) Bill accepting Sikkim's vote for merging with the Indian Union in the wake of the referendum on 14th May, 1975. The message of Indira Gandhi on 16th May said, "The good wishes of the entire country are with the people of Sikkim as they enter a new era of democracy and Constitutional Government."

It is still, indeed, our commitment to translate that message into a reality. Rest assured, Sir, we are committed to build a modern developed Sikkim. I want to assure the Members of the House that the Government is fully committed to the socio-economic development. It was for this reason that the States like the other north-eastern States have been accorded the status of a special category State which entitles it to receive 90 per cent of the Plan assistance as grant. Sikkim has been receiving substantial funds from the Central Government for its development. The quantum of Central assistance to the State Plan in the year 2008-09 was Rs.497 crores.

The State has also been included in the North-Eastern Council by amending the NEC Act. As a result, the State is getting project funding from the NEC. An amount of Rs.167.80 crores has been released to the State between 2003-04 and 2008-09.

Let me mention that it is not correct to say that the Plan allocation to a State is given solely on the basis of its population. Other factors like the relative backwardness of the State, the poverty-level, etc., are also taken into account. In fact, the per capita Plan assistance to the north-eastern States, including Sikkim, is among the highest in the country.

My colleague Shri R.P.N. Singh has comprehensively explained the initiatives which the

Central Government is taking for improving the road connectivity at the State and district level. My esteemed colleague, hon. MOS (Surface Transport), on the very first day, gave a detailed statement on how, many roads have been taken up. I am proud to say that even road is one of the sectors where we have spent a lot of money. Given some time, the road connectivity will be complete.

The State has also been included in the ADB assisted north-eastern State Road Project. The Members would appreciate the fact that Sikkim has a difficult topography and there are legitimate environmental concerns whenever a big project is undertaken. What we are looking for is sustainable development and not development at the cost of environment. Ministry of Environment & Forests is also providing assistance to the State under its various aforestation and environment-related schemes for preservation of its forests and other natural resources.

As regards air-connectivity, Sikkim is presently served through Bagdogra airport from where a helicopter service operates in Sikkim. But, a Greenfield Airport project at Pakyong in the State of Sikkim is being taken up at an estimated cost of Rs. 358.36. crores. Airports Authority of India are planning to complete the execution of the Project by January, 2012. For bringing the State on the Railway Map of the country, Sevoke-Rangpo Project has been approved by the Government of India as the Tenth National Project. For promoting tourism in the State, the Government has relaxed the LTC rules to permit Central Government employees to travel by air to the North Eastern States. This has immensely helped promoting tourism in the Region, especially, in Sikkim. Ministry of Tourism is remarkable, I should say. The Ministry of Tourism has sanctioned Rs. 150.49 crores during the first three years of the Eleventh Plan, up till 2009-10 (till date) to the Government of Sikkim for various tourism related projects. The rural tourism site Lachen in North Sikkim has been selected as one of the 15 rural eco-holiday destinations for Visit India Year 2009. I am also happy to inform the respected House that Tourism Ministry has recently declared the State of Sikkim as eco-tourism State. Ministry of Tourism has also recently approved three schemes for construction of Helipads/Heliports. The State of Sikkim has also got loan from the Asian Development Bank for development of tourism sector. Sir, to promote international tourism, my Ministry has initiated North-East India-ASEAN Cooperation. Recently, a Thai delegation visited the State in this regard. Sikkim, with Buddhist sites, would definitely appeal to these countries where large number of people practice Buddhism. Further, the Ministry of Tourism has been promoting the North-Eastern Region as Paradise Unexplored in their campaign in India and abroad. Increased tourist activity in the State has led to a number of new hotel projects. In this regard, I am happy to note, the North East Industrial Investment and Promotion Policy 2007 provides *inter-alia*, concessions for setting up tourism infrastructure. As a result of these measures, tourism in Sikkim during 2008 has grown at a healthy rate of about ten to twelve per cent over the year 2007 for international and domestic tourists who numbered about 19 thousand and 3.68

lakh respectively. Some Members have raised the issue of higher education. In this regard, as pointed out by one hon. Member, the Central Government has set up a Central University in the State. Besides, the State also has Sikkim-Manipur University which has been set up under a unique PPP mode.

The university has a facility for medical as well as engineering education. The Government feels that the present set up adequately meets the requirements of the State. Under the NLCPR Scheme of the Ministry of DoNER, so far, 197 projects have been sanctioned for speeding up the development of infrastructure in Sikkim. The total cost of the approved projects is Rs. 664.84 crores. Out of which, Rs. 505.31 crores have already been released. Out of an approved amount of Rs. 664.84 crores, about Rs. 400 crores was released during the period between 2004 and 2009 under the NLCPR. As a result of the concerted attempts of the Central and the State Government, Sikkim is surging ahead in the march towards the well-being State in the country to achieve 100 per cent sanitation and was the proud winner of the first Rashtriya Nirmal Gram Puraskar.

Sir, hon. Members have raised concern about officials of the State going on Central deputation. In this regard, my humble submission is, the officials go on deputation on the recommendation of the State Government. The All-India Services officials are common to both the Centre and the States. Their movement to the Centre broadens their outlook and horizon and, moreover, they act as an important link in appreciating the problems of the State.

Sir, Shri Ahluwaliaji, Shri Natchiappan and a few other hon. Members have raised the issue which is a legal and Constitutional matter. Well, at the moment, since I am concentrating on the socio-economic development of Sikkim, I think, I don't like to go into the matter. I have to discuss the issue with Constitutional, legal and other experts and only then I get back to the hon. Members concerned, I hope they will excuse me for this. At least, for the time being, I am not able to say anything on this.

SHRI S.S. AHLUWALIA: Sir, I will just make a point so that the hon. Minister can respond to that. The hon. Minister has just now mentioned that it needs consultation with Constitutional and legal expert. I would only like to say, please assure the House that you will take up the issue with the Home Ministry and the Finance Ministry. I need only that much. It does not need any consultation of DoNER Ministry with the Constitutional or legal experts. It needs the attention of the Finance Ministry and the Home Ministry. I need only this assurance from the hon. Minister.

SHRI B.K. HANDIQUE: I have already stated that I will examine this issue with appropriate Ministries and get back to the hon. Members.

Sir, in 2004, the Ministry of DONER was created. Let me inform Ahluwaliaji that from 2002-04, it was a Department only. It is the UPA Government which created the Ministry first in 2004. I do agree that two years before 2004, that is, 2002-03, 2003-04, they did some trial to start development

process in the North Eastern region. For that, we shall always be grateful. I have never said that they have not done. So, it is a kind of ongoing process. It started in 2002-03. So, I believe, Sir, that, I have clarified the position. Necessary steps are being taken. Sufficient funds are being provided by the Ministry for the development of Sikkim. I would like to assure my friend, the hon. Member, Shri O.T. Lepcha that necessary steps will be taken to complete all the projects in time. Now, I appeal to Mr. O.P. Lepcha to withdraw the Resolution and cooperate with us in going ahead with our development plans. Thank you, Sir.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (PROF. P.J. KURIEN): Thank you, Mr. Minister, but I believe Shri O.T. Lepcha is not here to give the reply or withdraw the Resolution. Now, the question is:

"Having regard to the fact that --

- (i) Sikkim was merged to the Union of India out of emotions in the year 1975;
- (ii) the Hindi speaking people of the State are proud to be Indian;
- (iii) Sikkim is the land locked State with no air and rail link to the State;
- (iv) the State shares its international borders with Nepal, Bhutan and China;
- (v) Sikkim is popularly called "mini Switzerland" of India with abundance of natural and scenic beauty including Mt. Kanchenjunga at its peak;
- (vi) even after 35 years of its merger, there is not much development in the State;
- (vii) there is no representation of the people of Sikkim in high Constitutional posts and other higher authorities;
- (viii) only life line of the State *i.e.*, the National Highway No 31-A remains disturbed throughout the year; and
- (ix) there is resentment in the peace loving people of Sikkim in view of its neglect, this House, therefore, in order to bring the people of Sikkim in the mainstream of the Country, urges upon the Government-
 - (a) to prepare an action plan for an all round development of the State of Sikkim;
 - (b) to connect the State with air and rail link at the earliest;
 - (c) to improve the road infrastructure in the State by acceding to the proposal received from the State Government;
 - (d) to consider appointment of the people of Sikkim to the Constitutional posts and in other higher authorities;
 - (e) to develop Sikkim as an international tourist destination in view of its vast potential; and
 - (f) to preserve the natural reserves of the State."

The Resolution was negatived.