

SHRI OM MEHTA : There is no time for any short or long duration discussion.

Keshod airport

*272. SHRIMATI SUMITRA G. KULKARNI : Will the Minister of TOURISM AND CIVIL AVIATION be pleased to state :

(a) whether Keshod airport in Gujarat is on the air map of Indian Airlines ;

(b) if not, what are the reasons therefor; and

(c) what steps Government propose to take to extend the facility of air services to the people in that area ?

THE MINISTER OF TOURISM AND CIVIL AVIATION (SHRI RAJ BAHADUR) : (a) to (c) Keshod was one of the 16 cities to which air services were discontinued by Indian Airlines with effect from 18-3-1974, due to the steep increase in the price of aviation fuel and the decision of the Corporation to phase out Viscounts and Dakotas from its fleet. Indian Airlines are considering the question of resuming air services between Bombay and Keshod, three times a week, with HS-748 aircraft, as part of its Summer Schedule, 1976.

SHRIMATI SUMITRA G. KULKARNI : Sir, Keshod is a small town on the west coast of Gujarat. It has special importance, because not only it has got a very big T. B. Hospital, but it is also connected industrially and business-wise with the African continent as well as the Middle East areas because businessmen from these areas have extensive relations there. That is the reason why Keshod is so important. But Keshod is not connected by Indian Airlines now. The Keshod airport has been improved and it has been made Avro-worthy. Then what prevented the Government from operating and putting it on the Indian Airlines map, because it is an important industrial centre?

SHRI RAJ BAHADUR : Sir, I do not for a moment dispute the importance of Keshod, particularly in view of the facts that have been stated by the hon. Member. But let me tell her that this airport was formerly of a specification which could take only Dakotas, not even 748. The hon. Member knows very well that the runway which was only 3750 x 150 ft. LCN has now been extended to a length of 4500 x 150 ft. LCN to entertain 748. The last part of the work is going to be completed by the middle of February. If I may state the figures, the traffic which was going on there was like this :

	Average per day
1967-68.	9
1968-69.	8
1969-70.	6
1970-71.	5
1971-72.	6
1972-73 (Nov.)	7
1973-74 (Nov.)	4

This was out of a total seating capacity of 26-28 for Dakotas and for Avros, which is more than that.

SHRIMATI SUMITRA G. KULKARNI : It is a fact that Keshod is a very important connecting link. That is why it is always connected with Porbandar. Now, Sir, my submission is that in view of the fact that in 4 days a week only the Indian Airlines operate up to Porbandar, and on these 4 days they can stop at Keshod. But till this is done, why aren't the Safari Airways which are plying up to Keshod connected up to Porbandar for the remaining three days? Then only it will help passengers in the area. We are not connected with our capital. The Gujarat capital is Ahmedabad. It is the only State where the capital is not connected with the rest of the State. We have to go to Bombay for reach-

ing Bhavnagar, Surat, Keshod, Porbandar, and so on. These are my difficulties, personal.....

(Interruptions)

This is a very vital difficulty which is experienced by the people of Gujarat and it should be rectified. Till the Indian Airlines is able to do it, Safari Airways could be allowed to operate.

SHRI RAJ BAHADUR : I will not lose a moment in appreciating the personal difficulties of the hon. Member.

MR. CHAIRMAN : You can allow her to meet you and discuss it.

श्री नागेश्वर प्रसाद शाही : श्रीमन, पिछले 25 साल मे गोरखपुर मे इतना बड़ा हवाई अड्डा है।

(Interruptions) श्रीमन बहुत महत्वपूर्ण सवाल है। वहां 25 साल से इतना बड़ा हवाई अड्डा है, वहां कोई भी विमान उतर सकता है।

MR. CHAIRMAN : It does not arise out of this. It is pertaining to Keshod.

श्री नागेश्वर प्रसाद शाही : वहां पहले भी हवाई सेवा थी। तो क्या मंत्री महोदय दिल्ली से पटना होते हुए कलकत्ता जाने वाले हवाई जहाज को हफ्ते में दो बार गोरखपुर डाइवर्ट करेंगे ?

श्री राजबहादुर : 25 साल मे भरतपुर में हवाई-अड्डा भी नहीं बनाया गया। गोरखपुर मे हवाई अड्डा तो है।

SHRI VIREN J. SHAH : Mr. Chairman, Sir, may I draw the attention of the hon. Minister that Keshod was in my Lok Sabha parliamentary constituency and in 1968 I had taken it up with the then Minister for Civil Aviation who had given in writing that this airport would be repaired and made airworthy? An amount of Rs. 35 lakhs sanctioned in 1968. May I know why is it mentioned even after 7 years that 4500' x 150' will be ready in 1976 summer? Also, the

figure of the passengers that the hon. Minister has given is totally misleading because every day from 1968 onwards, there were no bookings made available from Bombay to Keshod and only 6 or 7 or 8 passengers were booked. May I know from the hon. Minister when this airport is going to be effective? Gir lions are found only in this territory. There is the Somnath temple also.

SHRI RAJ BAHADUR : I take the information from the hon. Member that he was representing this constituency. I think it was presumably before 1971. But I would assure him that the figures that I have given are recorded figures. As regards the completion of the airport, I have said that we hope to complete it by the middle of next month.

SHRI KAMESHWAR SINGH : The delay in the repair of Keshod Airport is costing the country foreign exchange. We cannot sell tourism to the foreign tourists. They cannot go to Gir Forests to see lions. We cannot provide a package tour for seeing the lions. Therefore, the country is losing foreign exchange. I would like to know from the hon. Minister whether responsibility is going to be fixed on the officers who have delayed this project. I want a very specific answer.

SHRI RAJ BAHADUR : I will give a very specific answer. Sir, so far as Porbandar is concerned, the average traffic has been of the order of less than one per day during the years 1967-68 to 1973-74. The total average loss incurred on the two services going to Keshod and Porbandar during 1967-68 to 1973-74 has been about Rs. 28 lakhs per annum. I think the question of earning foreign exchange does not arise.

SHRI KAMESHWAR SINGH : It is about Porbandar only.

SHRI RAJ BAHADUR : I am talking about Keshod and Porbandar put together.