

RAJYA SABHA

Tuesday, the 17th August, 2004/ Sravana 26, 1926 (Saka)

the House met at eleven of the clock,

MR. CHAIRMAN in the Chair.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Tourist information centres at airports

*301. SHRIMATI PREMACARIAPPA:†
SHRI ANAND SHARMA:

Will the Minister of TOURISM be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government propose to set-up round-the-clock tourist information centres at all the International Airports of the country manned by competent and qualified staff to provide information to the tourists; and

(b) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF TOURISM (SHRIMATI RENUKA CHOWDHURY): (a) and (b) The Government of India, Department of Tourism has tourist information centres/information counters at the following International Airports:—

- (i) Delhi
- (ii) Mumbai
- (iii) Chennai
- (iv) Kolkata
- (v) Varanasi

The information counters at these airports are manned by competent and qualified staff for providing information to the tourists arriving by international flights.

† The question was actually asked on the floor of the House by Shrimati Prema Cariappa.

SHRIMATI PREMA CARIAPPA: Sir, the Minister has stated that the Government of India, Department of Tourism, has set up tourist information centres in all the international airports manned by qualified and efficient officers. Apart from this, I would like to know from the hon. Minister whether the Government proposes to set up tourism police for the safety of the tourists.

SHRIMATI RENUKA CHOWDHURY: Sir, the concept of tourism police has already been mooted and implemented. Several States have taken this up. Some States are still slack in implementing this. And, it is really the responsibility of the State Governments who have to implement this.

SHRIMATI PREMA CARIAPPA: Sir, my second supplementary is this. Karnataka also has important tourist places. But the number of tourists visiting the State of Karnataka is not adequate as the State tourism potential is not projected abroad. I would like to know from the hon. Minister as to what steps are being taken to project the tourist places of Karnataka abroad.

SHRIMATI RENUKA CHOWDHURY: I am very happy to announce that for the first time India is being marketed, as a brand image, as 'Incredible India'. Karnataka, of course, is as important to us as any other State in the country. All efforts are being made to promote Karnataka as a product in tourism everywhere, and it will largely depend on the interests and efforts of the Karnataka Government itself to promote their State.

SHRI ANAND SHARMA: I would like to know from the hon. Minister...

MR. CHAIRMAN: She is just sitting by your side. Ask her.

SHRI ANAND SHARMA: But I will have to ask through you, Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I think, the relations are very cordial. There is no need of a mediator.

SHRI ANAND SHARMA: Sir, given the fact that the Government of India is trying to attract tourists from all over the world and the 'Incredible India' tourist campaign which is there, still the information centres alone are not adequate. We have seen, like in the Delhi airport,—it is the capital of the country—when the tourists arrive here, they feel insecure. They do not get adequate information. There has been rampant crime. The taxis, which operate there, sometimes do not have the licence. And, this, in

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fact, dissuades the tourists from visiting India. Would the Minister consider linking up (a) tourist information centres between Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Calcutta and Bangalore and (b) ensure that the tourists who arrive here get all the information, and there is online booking of the hotels, etc., so that we can attract more tourists.

SHRIMATI RENUKA CHOWDHURY: I have to make it very clear, at the first place, to the hon. Member that our linking of Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Calcutta and Varanasi, have been done precisely for that reason that a tourist sitting in Varanasi might want to have information about Delhi, and we are already providing it. We also have a very comprehensive website, which people can get on-line, where they can get additional information, and there are also other centres which are giving not only verbal information but also printed and written information; they are free. Maps of cities as well as the details of places, which they want to visit, are given out here.

As regards safety of the tourists, it is not the responsibility of the Tourism Ministry alone; I may humbly submit this. I am sure, Members, across the floor of the House will join me in this collective responsibility. It is a matter of national shame that we have to worry about the simple safety not only of a visitor but also of every citizen. It is a growing concern and something that we need to look at the national level as a people collectively, because it is a matter of concern to us that, at least, our people should be safe.

MR. CHAIRMAN: And who will take the initiative for it?

SHRIMATI RENUKA CHOWDHURY: We are taking the initiative, Sir. Regarding the taxis at the airport, it is a fact that outside the airports, these have been in the hands of private touts, something that we are trying to do collectively with other agencies that are involved in this. But as far as tourism is concerned, if a tourist were to go to our office there, we will ensure that he gets a safe number, a safe taxi and a safe ride to his destination.

DR. K. MALAISAMY: Tho Minister has said that there are five places where these Information Centres are located. I would like to know, through you, Sir, how they are performing. What is your system to find out how they are performing? According to my information, the people there are not well-trained. Even if they are trained, they are not adequate. On the

other hand, how do you assess their performance? What is the system that you have to assess their performance?

SHRIMATI RENUKA CHOWDHURY: I am very glad that the hon. Member has asked me that question. First of all, I do not know which Information Centres he is talking about, because the ones at the local airports are the responsibility of the concerned State Governments. They have to take the onus of dealing with their State centres and inform the tourists who come to their States. What we have done from the Centre is to link up the international airports and, hence, the circuits that we have developed for information are highly advanced. We have the latest information in place; you can cross-check at any time. We have a way of assessing from the feedback that we get from various tourists as well as the performance output at these levels. I am also happy to inform you that today, at this point in time, if you look at the tourism figures of last year, we are already up and flying.

SHRI LALIT SURI: Sir, tourism in this country is gaining ground and the tourist inflow has been increasing. Yes, we do have these centres. But these centres are not enough to cater to tourists' needs. I would like to ask the hon. Minister whether it is possible to have private agencies to monitor these as long as the Government does not provide proper manning facilities at airports: Also, is there any possibility of giving fast-track clearance at the airports to foreigners who come here for a little fee?

SHRIMATI RENUKA CHOWDHURY: Sir, so far as giving fast-track clearance to a foreign tourist is concerned, we are now starting a paid-service which will facilitate the tourist who asks for special consideration. If you feel that the Government is not good enough or adequate enough to give the kind of information that you require, then, we will keep an open mind to look into private partnerships in this area also, provided you do not ask me questions in Parliament like this.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Question No. 302.

एअर इंडिया द्वारा विमानों का लीज पर लिया जाना

***302.श्री मोती लाल बोरा:** क्या नागर विमानन मंत्री यह बताने की कृपा करेंगे कि:

(क) क्या यह सच है कि एअर इंडिया ने लीज पर विमान लेने का निर्णय लिया है;