

Title: Need to provide connectivity to Bhubaneswar Airport with Varanasi via Gaya and upgrade it as an International Airport to promote tourism in the State. - Laid.

SHRI ANANTA NAYAK (KEONJHAR) : The sharp decline in the flow of tourists and particularly foreign tourists to Orissa is a matter of great concern. According to a recent estimate, the tourist inflow to Orissa has fallen from 30,000 to about 3,000.

The reasons for the decline in the flow of tourists to Orissa are not far to seek. One of the main reasons of the decline in tourist traffic is the absence of air connectivity between Bhubaneswar and Varanasi via Gaya. Earlier when Orissa was connected with Varanasi, the State was receiving about 30,000 foreign tourists. As Gaya receives a number of Buddhist tourists from South Asian countries and Orissa has plenty of places of Buddhist interest, it would be worth connecting Bhubaneswar with Gaya. International tourists coming to Varanasi will also visit Bhubaneswar via Gaya. Tourists from Japan and South East Asian countries are keen to visit Orissa because of the Buddhist link in Orissa. This would be possible if the Biju Patnaik Airport at Bhubaneswar is developed and upgraded as International Airport. It is also necessary to introduce domestic flights between Varanasi and Bhubaneswar via Gaya.

As such, I demand that the Bhubaneswar Airport is upgraded as an International Airport with new air connectivity between Varanasi and Gaya without any further delay.