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Title: Regarding shifting of Chief Administrative Office from Kochi to Allahabad.

SHRI K.C. VENUGOPAL (ALAPPUZHA): Through you, Madam, I would like to invite the kind attention of hon. Railway Minister to the concern regarding Railways' decision of shifting the Chief Administrative Office from Kochi to Allahabad. The development works related to the Railway in Kerala have dealt a severe blow with the shifting of the Chief Administrative Office from Kochi to Allahabad. The move follows a confidential report sent to the Railway Board suggesting that the office in Chennai could monitor the development works in Kerala and save the money spent on Kochi counterpart. This was not the first time the lobby had tried to weaken the Chief Administrative Office which has put Railway development in Kerala on fast track.

The Chief Administrative Office in Kochi was started in 2012 resulting in a huge leap in development in Kerala. The office was set up in Kochi to coordinate activities in Kerala which had long lagged in the development of Railway infrastructure. The office in the rank of Additional General Manager had a clear brief. The idea was to do away with the need of sending each file to the Southern Railway headquarters in Chennai for permission. The office was granted to Kerala in return for its demand for a peninsular zone after the formation of the Salem Division that split Palakkad.

It should be noted that of the Rs. 360 crore granted to Kerala in 2011-12 Budget, only Rs. 163.56 crore was utilized. However, Rs. 400.12 crore was spent in 2014-15 though the budgetary allocation was only Rs.357.55 crore. Madam, I am concluding.

The Chief Administrative Office and the Chief Engineer's Office differ in power. The CE only signs contracts below Rs.3 crore. Though there were only three big contracts signed per year before the setting up of the Chief Administrative Office, 40 big contracts per year on an average were signed after that. The office did a commendable job in untangling red tapes and talking things over with other offices, including that of the Chief Minister. With the shifting of the CE, development work has been derailed. Though Kerala received Rs.530 crore in 2015-16, only Rs.170 crore has been spent halfway into the financial year. A lobby is working to stop the money for development in Kerala because unutilized fund eventually goes to other States. Madam, I am concluding.

Therefore, I am requesting the hon. Minister, through you Madam, to stop this initiative. We should retain the CE Office in Cochin itself. Otherwise it will create problems for Kerala. The entire railway development will be in trouble. Therefore, we are requesting the Minister to stop this initiative.

HON. SPEAKER: Shri P. Karunakaran, Dr. A. Sampath, Shri Mullappally Ramchandran and Shri M.I. Shanavas are permitted to associate with the issue raised by Shri K.C. Venugopal.