

Sixteenth Loksabha

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Title: Regarding restoration of Haj subsidy.

SHRI P.R. SUNDARAM (NAMAKKAL): The decision to scrap Haj subsidy was an unwarranted one. The Haj subsidy provision was not introduced by any previous Governments. In fact it was there during colonial era, since 1932. Beneficiary of Haj subsidy was not only the poor Muslims pilgrims to Mecca for Haj, but also ailing Air India.

Therefore, scrapping of Haj subsidy will affect both. Currently, Saudi Arabia permits 1,75,025 Indian Muslims for Haj. In the name of Haj subsidy the biggest gainer was Air India, as no other flight operators were allowed under Haj subsidy. Haj subsidy was given in the form of concession of air fare only. Haj subsidy was a relief for a major chunk of pilgrims who undertook pilgrimage.

Over the years Haj subsidy amount has been getting reduced for many reasons. However, those who are unable to pay the huge air fare, the subsidy should remain as it is, to enable poor Muslims of the country to undertake Haj pilgrimage. The Government says that the Haj subsidy amount now will be used for the welfare of Indian Muslims. But the fact is that there is no fixed amount for

Haj subsidy and it is only concession in air fare and this amount depends upon a number of people undertaking Haj pilgrimage. I would also like to remind the Government that stopping Haj subsidy will pave the way for demands for stopping Government expenditure for other religious activities. Therefore, I urge upon the Government to rethink on scrapping of Haj subsidy.

