

tourism is export

Text of the Speech delivered by Mr. S. K. Kooka, Commercial Director, Air-India, at the 13th Annual Convention of the Travel Agents' Association of India, Agra, February 15, 1964.

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My Travel Agent Friends,

It's good to be in your midst again — like coming home. If Gallup took a poll in India of the three questions most frequently asked, I'd put my money on —

- i) Who'll succeed Mr. Nehru ?
- ii) How much do you pay for your Scotch? and
- iii) Will they relax the 'P' form in April ?

not necessarily in that order!

Two people hold the answer to the burning question where you're concerned... God and T.T.K. And if April brings the heat and nothing else, **YOU** don't have to despair. For if your passengers don't have a sister, a brother, a father, a mother abroad, you're slipping! Ask them to produce their family tree and then improve on it. Have they forgotten Uncle Ranjit who left India at the turn of the century, one of our earlier revolutionaries. He was 70 then, so what — who's counting!

All your client needs is a letter from him. He was illiterate, but let's not be fussy. Armed with his invitation and your contact in the R.B.I., i.e. the Reserve Bank of India, his blood relation, that's your passenger, will soon be in old Ranjit's before God claims him for the second time!

'P' FORM

And so life goes on, because there's no Reserve Bank on earth that can stop the ingenuity of man, leave alone yours! I don't have to tell you, my enterprising friends, that **AFFIDAVITS** are not born in heaven and **SINGH** is a wonderful name.....exploit it to the full! And if you're not a pedlar of immigrant traffic, remember there're Conventions, Conferences and a million Associations rarin' to invite your client to be their guest. Make no mistake, hospitality

is no monopoly of the East, inspite of what we might say. And so, I don't have to tell you that if Government is obstinate, 'P' is just one letter of the alphabet, there are 20 more where that came from !

Laws are destined to be broken. Our Government doesn't need a computer to figure out how many crores of Foreign Exchange this country loses each year by the noble strategy of under and over-invoicing, by the smuggling of gold, by the purchase of travellers' cheques at every street corner. A sensible relaxation in the 'P' form would be chicken feed, in comparison to the millions of foreign exchange being lost to the country.

Let's pray then for a moment, that our new Finance Minister, in his great wisdom, will realise that our shirt of hair looks a little silly in a hot climate, and is somewhat contradictory when our Government asks the world, beseeches the world, begs the world to come and visit us, for at long last it has dawned on them that the miserable Rs. 19 crores we make a year out of tourism is just 15th of what the minimum target should be, could be.

And before I finish with the 'P' form, here's a true story of Mr. Nehru coming one night to this city to pay homage to the beautiful creature, its marble loveliness bathed in moonlight. This is what Panditji said: "Offspring of Shahjahan, unique mausoleum, I come to express my gratitude, the gratitude of my country and my people, for thou art my biggest tourist attraction; thou art my great foreign exchange earner. Tell me, Oh Taj, how can I prove my indebtedness to you". And the Taj in a husky voice replied..... "Son, fix me my 'P' form quick!"

We missed you gentlemen, when Mr. S. K. Patil spoke two weeks ago at the Hoteliers Convention in Delhi. Ram Pershad, Chairman of the Hoteliers Federation, is either an astrologer or ambidexterous. He invited Mr. Patil to lunch and made him his Guest Speaker for the afternoon session. And at the Banquet the same night, Mr. Raj Bahadur, our Minister, and Mr. Manubhai Shah were also invited and asked to speak. Mr. Patil announced, with great vigour and conviction, that prohibition was on its last legs, that tourism was both exit and entry, that the 'P' form made no sense. Let the Indian loose abroad and he's bound to persuade more people to come to his country. Mr. Patil stated that Army Officers, good in themselves, could not be expected to manage national hotels, and finally, that our earnings from tourism were a fraction of what they could be. Fundamental observations, full of meat and horse sense. Unfortunately for us, Mr. Patil is missing an essential piece of his baggage, his portfolio, and that can make a passenger very vocal !

Gentlemen, your problems are many, but the main ones you can count on one hand. The death or mutilation of the 'P' form, more and better hotels, more seats on I.A.C., the abolition of the curse that is prohibition, motor cars that cost the earth and represent the worst value in the world, and freedom from tyranny for the tourist. From the tyranny of the Central Board of Revenue, of the Ministry of Home Affairs, of the Planning Commission, so that 2,500 crores are not earmarked for the manufacture and export of steel in the Fourth Five-Year Plan with the road from Santa Cruz airport to Bandra remaining the 'pride' of a suburban municipality! Maharashtra's Minister for Tourism has assured us that from tomorrow, the local inhabitants of that super slum — 4 miles long — will put on their pants when a tourist passes by!

I.A.C. has survived their long vigil and glory be, this month celebrates the introduction of the Caravelle — just three years behind schedule. That I.A.C. waited so long to get modern equipment proves that the powers that be aren't aware of the benefit and importance of tourism to the economy of this country. To Mr. V. Shankar, ex-Chairman of I.A.C. and now Secretary for Food, goes the un-dying credit for battling a long and weary struggle for I.A.C.'s Caravelles.

I don't say this because I'm with Air-India, but I'm convinced that with no likelihood of I.A.C. securing more than four Caravelles, a morning and evening Boeing service between Bombay and Delhi and a daily Boeing between Bombay and Calcutta, plus four Caravelles on the important trunk routes will establish a fine pattern of fast communications between our major cities. The fact that there are two separate Air Corporations in our country should not prevent those in power from realising that the public, the travel agents and our tourist from abroad should not be ignored for reasons of ego and izzat.

SHORTAGE OF HOTEL ROOMS

To come to another big problem that confronts us, no one knows better than you do, the annoyance, the frustration and the loss of business we have all experienced due to the chronic shortage of hotel rooms in this country. Delhi's last hotel was the Ashoka. When Clemenceau remarked that New Delhi would make the finest ruin of them all, he must have had the Oberoi-Kila in mind. Room-wise Calcutta has been stagnant for three decades. And Bombay could do with 350 new rooms today and the same number tomorrow.

Time and again, Mr. J.R.D. Tata, Chairman of Tata Sons, has stated that Tatas are not in the hotel business, that the Taj is a tradition he's carrying on with, in spite of the fine assistance he receives from the Government of Maharashtra on their prohibition policy!

If Mr. Birla owns a hotel, you and I have yet to see it. We have not heard any recent reports on the great G.D. being short of cash or a plot of land in any city in India.

And so the hoteliers of India are having a field day. They've been having themselves a ball with an occupancy ratio that is unhealthily high for longer than we care to remember. And each night when they sleep on their beds of gold, they ask God "Please see that no more hotels are built, at least, not in a hurry, because we've never had it so good".

Exasperation point has been reached. I don't say Government are not to blame as well. They could have made far more effort to allocate suitable plots of land in Bombay, Calcutta and Delhi to our hoteliers at less than extortionate rates.

This is no time, however, for apportioning blame or indulging in academic arguments. India is screaming for new hotels. The granaries of our hoteliers are full. The loss is not theirs, it's ours and the country's, if the present, grinding stand-still continues where new hotels are concerned. Now gentlemen, much as we love our hotelier friends, I'm sure they'd be the first to agree with us that where the quality of our hotels is concerned, with a possible exception of two or three in this country, they're flying Dakotas and Skymasters and the odd Viscount, when the rest of the world are flying big jets.

There's no point in our hoteliers asking what's wrong with our hotels! The book says our schedule on earth is three score and ten, frankly, we haven't the time to answer.

Travel Agents, airlines, tour promoters, and the international tourist is not concerned with reasons for this lack of accommodation and the lack of deluxe hotels in this country.

A world famous international hotel Corporation, in fact the largest in the world, have been having talks with our Government for eight years to open shop in this country in a big way. Their skill, their efficiency, their expertise are what this country needs, so that your tourists and our passengers can come from Tokyo, Hong Kong, Rome, Teheran, Cairo, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore and get the service and quality they are used to, so that we don't have to spend the days of our lives saying No to Conventions, Conferences and Tour Groups. A fleet of new hotels of international standing can only bring wealth and prosperity to you travel agents, to us airlines, to our shops, our handloom emporiums, in fact, to India. New hotels bring new business, I don't have to tell you that.

And now, when our Government have been having final and earnest deliberations with the world's largest hotel group, what

does our vigilant hotel federation do. They rattle off telegrams to the Prime Minister, to the Home Minister, to the Finance Minister, to the Secretary General and to the Chambers of Commerce, protesting against any talk of Calcutta, Bombay, Delhi and Madras having glittering new hotels with an international name, a name that even Eastern Europe, that is Communist Europe, is now courting on the same terms and conditions as the rest of the world have accepted, are accepting.

If this international hotelier has signed agreements with 28 countries, developed and under developed, surely, it's commonsense for us to follow suit. And then for our hotel federation to state that for political reasons this foreign hotel corporation should not be allowed to bring millions of dollars of tourism to our country is, a bit thick. When this was mentioned at the Hoteliers Convention in Delhi two weeks ago, an irate hotelier asked me what my reaction would be if Air-India were handed over to a foreign carrier to manage. My submission was that it isn't necessary !

It's time the Indian Hoteliers faced a little competition. It will do them a world of good. Academic questions such as who'll manage the hotel, who'll participate in the equity capital are red herrings. Progress and prosperity should not be balked by vested interests, 19 crores have to be a 100 crores, let's get on with the job.

PROHIBITION

Let us kneel and pray that the courageous and realistic Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Mr. Vasantrao Naik will succeed, that this coming First of April will not be another Fools' Day; that we may on that Wednesday morning have something in our glasses with which to celebrate the relaxation in 'P' form. Then, gentlemen, we'll be killing two birds with no stones !

What problems we have in this country vis-a-vis those that face our friends from abroad, who have been kind enough to come a long way to be in our midst today. In Bombay, our guests in this room can have a drink in a Permit Room in a hotel. In Delhi, they can do no such thing, because there are no Permit Rooms. However, in Delhi, they can buy bottles of liquor in a shop. But not on a Tuesday, not on a Friday and never on a public holiday, plus an inexplicable ban on the first of every month. So the Delhi-walla gets his pay cheque and waits for tomorrow with his tongue hanging out. Even the Good lady in the song had just one day of rest !

Another example of consistency is the fact that you can buy our Export Gin, called Blue Ribbon Gin, in Bombay, on a permit of course, but not in Delhi, where there's no permit, the reason

being that its alcoholic content is a bit more. But Gordon's Gin you can buy in Delhi, inspite of its higher alcoholic content. Now you know, why we die so young.

THE AUTOMOBILE QUESTION

Our visitors from abroad may have noticed the high standard of our automobiles in Delhi and the frightful standards in every other part of India. The reason is the diplomatic corps. The basic cost of an automobile in this country is two to three times what it costs abroad with delivery dates ranging from two to seventeen years. India needs a Chevrolet, a medium-sized car like the American Compact, or the British Zephyr, and a tough small car as rugged as the Volkswagen, which you'll remember was Hitler's car for the masses, with an engine you don't have to look at for a hundred thousand miles. The automobile situation in our country is completely flat-footed and is going to create difficulties for us. Unfortunately, our problem is not assisted by the fact that those responsible for our roads also manufacture our shock-absorbers and springs.

Air-India offered our Government an excellent scheme whereby you gentlemen could get the latest American motor cars, brand new, with no loss of foreign exchange to our country. Unfortunately, a car which costs Rs. 15,000/- in America would eventually be delivered to you for Rs. 59,000/- after going through the funeral rites of duty, sur-charge on duty, excise tax, sur-charge on excise tax, handling fees and other sundry damage, to remind you that we are an under developed country and if you're interested in taking a tourist around in comfort in our land, you deserve to be taken for a ride !

So, with the automobile problem, a very real one for the tourist trade, an enterprising travel agent has suggested to our Government that he can purchase one-year-old New York taxi cabs showing 50,000 miles on the clock at no more than 500 dollars a piece. The fact that this proposal has appealed to our Ministry of Finance proves that a suitable automobile is being manufactured in India today! Second-hand New York taxi cabs for the luxury tourist trade of India. The proposal has all the charm of wearing someone else's underwear.

Year after year, you, band of dedicated pilgrims, gather together to voice your grievances, take stock of the results of the past 12 months and pass resolutions to improve your lot and the foreign exchange of your country. And year after year, our benevolent Minister, Mr. Raj Bahadur, comes in your midst. He's helpful, kind and considerate. The Hon'ble Minister and Som Chib are one of us. What hurts you hurts them, what exasperates us does the same to them. But gentlemen, unfortunately for you, that target of a hundred crores is guarded by a multi-headed HYDRA, who refuses

to believe that tourism is the most competitive industry in the world; that hard-headed, progressive, affluent nations like England, Japan, France and Italy are smart enough to realise that tourism can wipe out a nation's adverse trade balance. Australia, Japan, Hong Kong, Egypt, Thailand and Tahiti are vying for the tourist dollar and deutsche mark. A tourist doesn't have to come to India, India has to stretch out and grab him from other eager and efficient hands.

Unfortunately for you, there are people of high import in our land, who are convinced that our culture and our monuments can take the place of first class hotels, clean linen, good roads, good automobiles, the abolition of our miserable slums, particularly on roads frequented by tourists. Their philosophy is, there's only one India and he, who doesn't come to us, is the loser. And so, we continue to earn 19 sad crores of cultured rupees, year after year, with the rest of the world streets ahead of us.

Realisation will come. It's bound to come. You and I may be underground by then, on a subway that never comes back, but it's our duty to get up on our soap boxes and entreat those in power to see the light. Talking about lights, Delhi is a most attractive capital, and New Delhi, with its lovely trees, a most suitable spot for murder, for never was a capital so dimly lit, that motor cars are driven with their head lamps flat out. And as for the disciplined tribe of cyclists, if only their parents had practised family planning.

STUDY ON TOURISM

Our Government, perturbed at our foreign exchange ex tourism, commissioned the Stanford Research Institute to produce a study on tourism to India. Now **YOU** could have told Government exactly what Stanford has done; the only difference being that the quality of the paper used for the report is imported and, therefore, beyond your means. T.A.A.I. on the other hand is a local body and I don't have to tell you about a prophet and his country.

Stanford's findings make interesting reading. What do American tourists like and what do they not like about India, tours to India and tourist attractions in India. Interviews were conducted with travel agents, with previous travellers to India, carriers' representatives and travel editors. With American thoroughness a psychologist was a part of the team. She was a lady. She must have handled the travel agents !

The deterrents of travel to India were as follows:—

- i) Our good old customs. And I don't mean our habits. I refer to the gents in white who make the strongest tourist turn white at the sight of them.
- ii) Poverty, slums, beggars.

- iii) Trouble with reservations non-honoured or incorrect. You don't have to look at Bhag Israni. He only joined I.A.C. a few months ago !
- iv) Inadequate and poor accommodation. So much for the Hotel Federation of India !
- v) The food earned a number of crosses, as did our conception of cleanliness.
- vi) It was felt that India's publicity abroad could be considerably improved. And bless their sweet soul, they added that the Government of India could profit from Air-India's publicity. Stanford had obviously not gotten around to our Lady Godiva ad — and to our other one when we put Krishna Menon in red sprint pants and had a strip torn off us for both offences.
- vii) And finally, there were the hardy perennials of prohibition and sanitary conditions.

OUR CUSTOMS

On the credit side was the Taj Mahal, the tomb, not the hotel, our friendly people, our religions and our culture, and the good service rendered by our Tourist offices abroad. Talking about our customs, you'll be interested in the following extract of a letter from my Chairman, Mr. J. R. D. Tata, to Mr. B. N. Banerji, Chairman of the Central Board of Revenue, of the 28th of January of this year :—

"Dear Shri Banerji,

I was happy to learn that on the 10th of this month you visited Santa Cruz Airport early in the morning to study personally on the spot the procedures in force in processing passengers with their baggage through customs.

May I congratulate you on, and also thank you for this almost unheard of action on the part of a Chairman of the Central Board of Revenue? I have, for years, been concerned over the grievous inconvenience and delays inflicted on arriving and departing passengers and the deterrent effect this has had on tourist traffic to India.

Now that we have become fully awakened to the tremendous foreign exchange earning potential of tourist traffic, it is clear, like all other countries which go out of their way to cater to tourist traffic, we must expedite and simplify our immigration and Customs formalities and make tourists feel welcome as they are so obviously made to feel in Switzerland, Italy, France and other countries. It is, therefore, most refreshing to find you taking

such a personal interest in the matter and I am sure that much good will come from it.

In my view, the basic difficulty in India has not been a lack of helpfulness or courtesy on the part of the Customs staff, so much as a wrong, basic approach to the problem on the part of the Government as a whole, for which the Customs organization, which can only carry out policies and regulations, cannot be blamed. The Customs Department has, since its inception, been treated exclusively as a revenue earner for the Government, and its procedures, regulations and practices have been devised, directed and operated with that sole purpose in view. In terms of such a philosophy, it was natural that such considerations as the convenience and reaction of travellers should have been ignored.

The emphasis must now change from "How much more can we collect in import duties and penalties?" to "How many more foreign tourists can we entice to our shores and how much of their foreign currency can we induce them to spend in India."

In foreign countries which enjoy large tourist traffic, the collection of Customs revenues from travellers is considered of minor importance in comparison with the money that can be earned from expenditure by tourists within the country. As a result, the baggage of foreign incoming travellers is rarely opened for inspection, except in the most cursory manner and with the greatest courtesy. On the other hand, Customs inspection of nationals of the country is much more severe and rightly so.

I have, therefore, consistently advocated a drastic liberalization of rules and procedures in the case of foreign travellers to India under which only on rare occasions would their baggage be opened and their passage through Customs prolonged. I sincerely hope that your visit to Santa Cruz was an indication of an impending change in this direction".

Dear Mr. Banerji, we, of the travel trade, have our fingers crossed!

TOURIST OFFICES

And talking about our tourist offices abroad, we have less than a dozen, but no less than one hundred and twenty seven Embassies, Missions and Consular offices scattered throughout the world. Som Chib sweats blood to get one extra selling post for India, but where

External Affairs are concerned, the sky is the limit on foreign exchange expenditure, and foreign exchange is the reason for no more tourist offices.

We've an Embassy in Mexico City and Mexico has one in Delhi. Now **YOU** try to get a visa to Mexico for an Indian and come back to me after 90 days, I'd like to hear your story. And if you think that's long, try Burma, Indonesia and plenty more.

If the Stanford report states that our Tourist Offices are doing a fine job abroad, can't the Planning Commission realise that we need many, many more selling posts if those 19 crores are to become a hundred, if the travellers of the world are to be made aware of what our lovely country and our good people have to offer them. Diplomats aren't salesmen and India has to go out and sell. Time's a-wastin Mr. Finance Minister, Mr. Home Minister and every Chief Minister of all the States in India, who have something to offer the tourist.

And now my Travel Agent Friends, may I say how proud we carriers are of you. You're doing a fine job for India. Your Chairman, and the luminaries of the Travel Trade in India are a dedicated brood of men and women who earn their livelihood — feeding and clothing the airlines, the steamship companies, the railways. As for our Railways, they've expressed their gratitude to you by reducing your commission from five to three per cent !

In Srinagar two years ago, I told you that you were the cream in my coffee, the salt in my stew, that you will always be my necessity, that I'd be lost without you.

And that, gentlemen, is still my song today.

