

Gill questions govt funding of pilgrimages

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Does Constitution of the country allow the Union government to fund religious pilgrimages?

Member of the Rajya Sabha from Punjab Dr M.S. Gill, participating in a discussion on Haj pilgrimage in the House, today raised this question. Dr Gill raised it when Pranab Mukherjee external affairs minister was answering queries in this regard. Mukherjee told the House the Union government would provide Rs 400 crore to 1 lakh Muslims for Haj.

Dr Gill told The Tribune on the phone from Delhi he asked the home minister to

Debate in RS

request the Supreme Court to give its verdict on the case pending before it at the earliest. "This is a fundamental question of policy for the whole House whether the Union government should spend money for religious pilgrimage. It is also question about Nehru and Ambedkar's secular Constitution provided to the country", said Dr Gill in the Rajya Sabha.

Dr Gill said would the government also send Christians and Jews by air for pilgrimage to Jerusalem? Would the government also send Hindus to Mansarovar for pilgrimage by air via Beijing or Kathmandu? he asked. Sev-

eral Hindu pilgrims were killed every year while moving through the snow-laden mountains to Mansarovar, he added. Why arrangement could not be made for them by the Union government for by air free travel to Mansarovar? he asked.

Will the Union government also fund the pilgrimage of Sikhs to Lahore, Panja Sahib and Nankana Sahib by air? At present, Sikhs have to pay Rs 1,100 per head to travel to Lahore, which is just 40 km from Amritsar, by bus.

Dr Gill said since it was a basic policy issue related to Constitution of the Country, the home minister should get the issue decided from the Supreme Court.