

## **SHRI AMARNATHJI YATRA 2013**

**No Yatra registration without Health Certificate; 55 day Yatra to begin on 28<sup>th</sup> June.**

NEW DELHI, 31<sup>st</sup> January, 2013 - Mr. N.N. Vohra, Governor of Jammu and Kashmir, who is the Chairman of the Shri Amarnathji Shrine Board, chaired the over three hour meeting of the Board which was held here today.

The meeting was attended by Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan, Justice (Retd.) G.D. Sharma, Pandit Bhajan Sopori, Shri Vijay Dhar and Dr. (Prof.) Ved Kumari Ghai, all Members of the Board. Besides, Shri Navin K. Choudhary, Chief Executive Officer and Shri Preet Pal Singh, Additional Chief Executive Officer of the Shrine Board, also attended the meeting.

The Board noted the judgment passed by the Supreme Court on 13<sup>th</sup> December 2012 regarding the responsibilities of the Central and State governments, and the Shrine Board, in respect of arrangements to be made for future Shri Amarnathji Yatras, commencing from 2013. It was also noted that the Supreme Court has accepted the report of Special High Powered Committee as a part of its judgment, and has constituted a Sub Committee comprising Chief Secretary, J&K; CEO, Shrine Board; and Home Secretary, J&K, to implement the directions of the apex court. It is to be recalled that the Supreme Court had earlier constituted a Special High Powered Committee (SHPC) to review the arrangements being made for the smooth conduct of the Yatra and suggest, among other things, measures to upgrade the health facilities, track conditions, infrastructure in the Yatra area and steps to preserve the environment. The Shrine Board was informed that a comprehensive Action Plan has been drawn up to implement the recommendations of SHPC and directions of the Supreme Court.

The CEO, Shrine Board, informed that the Yatris would have to furnish a Compulsory Health Certificate while seeking registration for Yatra 2013. He stated that a Committee of Medical Experts drawn from the Union Health Ministry and the State Health Department had designed the format of the Compulsory Health Certificate and the Yatri shall now be required to submit information in the form of a self declaration about his/ her current health status, past medical history and various ailments from which he/she may be

suffering or may have suffered in the past. He further informed that for ensuring against the use of fraudulent Health Certificates, the Compulsory Health Certificate would be issued only by duly authorized doctors and medical institutes and further the Certificates issued after 1<sup>st</sup> February 2013 would be valid. The CEO informed that all States and UTs have been asked to furnish a list of doctors/ medical institutes who would be authorized to issue the Compulsory Health Certificate to the eligible Yatris of the State/UT.

The Board directed the CEO, SASB, to issue very clear Advisories, from time to time, to inform every intending Yatri about the requirement of obtaining the prescribed Compulsory Health Certificate from the authorized doctors/ medical institutes. The Board further directed the CEO to compile State-wise lists of authorized doctors/ medical institutes and upload the information on Board's website, [www.shriamarnathjishrine.com](http://www.shriamarnathjishrine.com), for the information of all intending Yatris. The Board desired that the CEO should also publicize the information through the print and electronic media for several weeks running before the Yatra commences. In this context, the Board noted that the Chairman had sent a personal letter to the Minister of Information and Broadcasting to seek the Ministry's strong support for an effective education cum awareness programme being carried out through the national and regional channels of AIR and Doordarshan. The Board directed the CEO to urgently follow up with the Union Ministry of Information and Broadcasting to ensure early launch of the awareness campaign. The CEO was further directed to ensure effective publicity to make one and all aware about: (i) requirement on the part of every Yatri to furnish the prescribed Compulsory Health Certificate; (ii) details of the doctors/ medical institutes who are authorized by various States/ UTs to issue Compulsory Health Certificates; (iii) Do's and Don't's to be followed by the Yatris during the course of the Yatra.

Regarding the duration and date of commencement of the Yatra 2013, the Board relied upon the approach set out by the Board's Sub Committee, chaired by H.H. Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, which had been set up in July 2011 to advise the Board regarding the duration and schedule of future Yatras. The Board noted that even on 25<sup>th</sup> June 2012, the date on which Yatra 2012 had commenced, there was heavy frozen snow accumulation in the Domel, Sheshnag and Holy Cave Camp areas because of which it was very difficult to set up power and water supply facilities in the Yatra Camps. Even the Langar Organizations were not able to set up their Langars, particularly at Sheshnag, by 25<sup>th</sup> June 2012. Keeping in view the

foremost concern of safety and security of the pilgrims, the Board decided that a 55 day Yatra would commence on 28<sup>th</sup> June 2013 and conclude on Raksha Bandhan on 21<sup>st</sup> August 2013. The Board directed that the CEO would arrange a special Pooja on the day of Jyesth Purnima, which falls on 23<sup>rd</sup> June this year. This Pooja shall, if possible, take place at the Holy Cave or any other suitable location in the Yatra area to invoke the blessings of Lord Shiva for the smooth and safe conduct of the pilgrimage.

The Board deliberated in detail the number of Yatris who would be granted Yatra Permits, date-wise and route-wise, for this year's Yatra. Keeping in view that it would not be possible, as directed by the Supreme Court, to upgrade the walking tracks along both the routes in the Yatra area before the commencement of this year's Yatra, the Board decided that 7,500 Yatris, excluding Yatris who travel by helicopters from Baltal and Pahalgam to Panjtarni, would be allowed to register for the pilgrimage on per day per route basis. The Board further directed that, in view of the new procedures involved, particularly the Compulsory Health Certificate, the registration process should commence well ahead of the commencement of the Yatra but not later than 1<sup>st</sup> March 2013.

The Board also discussed the recommendations of National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) regarding the upper and lower age limit of the Yatris who may be allowed to undertake the Yatra. The Board was informed that NDMA has recommended that no child under the age of 11 years, no person above the age of 80 years and no pregnant lady with more than six weeks pregnancy should be allowed to undertake the Yatra. The Board noted that Nitesh K. Sen Gupta Committee had also recommended that no person under the age of 15 years and no person above the age of 65 years should ordinarily be encouraged to undertake the pilgrimage. The Board deliberated on the matter and decided that no one below the age of 13 years or above the age of 75 years and no pregnant lady with more than six weeks pregnancy should be allowed to undertake the Yatra.

Regarding registration, the Board noted that during Yatra 2012 internet generated e-Yatra Permits had been fraudulently duplicated and used by a large number of unregistered Yatris to enter into the Yatra area. It was decided that the provision of on-line facility would be discontinued to avoid misuse of Yatra Permits, particularly also because the on-line mode is not logistically compatible for verifying whether a Yatri possesses a valid Compulsory Health Certificate or

not. The Board stressed the need for the Police to ensure that no Yatri is able to embark on the Yatra who does not possess a Yatra Permit which is valid for that route and the date on which he seeks to cross over. To facilitate Police personnel deployed at the Access Control Gates at Domel and Chandanwari in determining whether a Yatri possesses a Yatra Permit valid for the relevant date and route, the Board decided that Yatra Permits should be colour coded on the proposed lines. Thus, for Yatra 2013 the Yatra Permit would be of a specified colour for each day of the week.

The Board was also briefed about the steps being taken to improve the health facilities in the Yatra area. The CEO informed that Medical Aid Centres (MACs) would be set up enroute to the Holy Cave at a regular distance of about 2 kms and that the State Health Department was procuring infrastructure, equipment and medicines for providing upgraded health facilities to the Yatris this year. The Board was informed that the Union Health Ministry had asked other States/ UTs to depute Specialist doctors on deputation to J&K for the Yatra period for ensuring the health care of the pilgrims. The CEO informed that, as per the directions of the Supreme Court, for upgrading the proficiency of the doctors deployed in the Yatra area, training programmes are being organized in February-March 2013. The Board was informed that a detailed Standard Operating Procedure was being formulated for the timely evacuation of ill/ injured pilgrims with the assistance of State Disaster Management Authority and Air Force. In addition, Mountain Rescue Teams would also be deployed at identified places to help infirm Yatris in negotiating steep climbs in the Yatra area. The Board was informed that assistance was being sought from private players and NGOs for setting up Medical Camps in the Yatra area and for providing much needed assistance to unaccompanied sick/ injured Yatris.

The Board also took note of the two memoranda submitted by Vishav Hindu Parishad and Baba Amarnath & Baba Buda Amarnath Yatri Niyas and deliberated upon the various suggestions put forth by them including their suggestions about the schedule and duration of Yatra.