

Regarding the plight of cashew workers in Kollam and Alappuza

SHRI KODIKUNNIL SURESH (MAVELIKKARA): Sir, the plight and agony of cashew sector workers in Kollam and Alappuzha who are striking work for want of renewed wages and decent benefits from their vocation portrays a grim and unfortunate picture of the crisis engulfing the cashew sector in Kerala. Cashew sector provides livelihood to more than three and a half lakh workers, majority of them being women from backward communities.

The minimum wages of cashew workers have not been revised even after 10 years since the then Oommen Chandy's Government, which was the last Government to have increased the wages of cashew workers. The present State Government under the Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan has ignored the plight of cashew workers and their wages have not been revised. The present wages are even lower than the wages of MGNREGS workers. The strike by cashew workers is taking place in various cashew factories in Karimulackal, Nooranadu, and adjacent constituency, Kayamkulam, including in my Parliamentary Constituency. All the factories come under Cashew Development Corporation. The demand to raise the minimum wages is not limited to Kollam district alone but other districts like Alleppey, Pathanamthitta, and Thiruvananthapuram are also facing this crisis.

The benefits of cashew workers including ESI and PF benefits are also denied to the cashew workers because the working hours and days are not proper. That is why ESI and PF benefits should be given to cashew workers. The women cashew workers used to earn Rs. 500 per day but now workers are paid Rs. 735 for shelling one kilogram of raw cashews and Rs. 745 for peeling the kernel. The meagre sum they get once in a while does not even cover their food expenses or medical emergencies. Many women cashew workers are now working as household helps and do other sundry jobs to sustain themselves.

There was a time when more than 780 licensed cashew factories functioned in Kerala, but their number is now reduced to less than 80. In the 1980s and 1990s, cashew export peaked at 125,000 metric tonnes, which has scaled down to less than 20,000 metric tonnes. This situation indicates the alarming crisis of the entire industry as banks have wound up numerous cashew factories.

HON. CHAIRPERSON: Please conclude. It is Zero Hour.

SHRI KODIKUNNIL SURESH: More than ten owners of small-scale cashew factories have committed suicide in Kerala.

Therefore, the plight of the cashew workers must be addressed by declaring a special package for welfare of cashew workers with umbrella welfare options including ex-gratia, ? (*Interruptions*) financial support during the period of unemployment ? (*Interruptions*)

माननीय सभापति : आप अधिक समय लेंगे तो अन्य माननीय सदस्यों को समय नहीं मिलेगा।

? (व्यवधान)

SHRI KODIKUNNIL SURESH: Sir, I am just completing.

HON. CHAIRPERSON: Please conclude immediately.

? (*Interruptions*)

SHRI KODIKUNNIL SURESH: Sir, I am making my last point.

I demand financial support during the period of unemployment, free medical treatment at ESIC hospitals and soft loans. The cashew workers must be given their fair share of outstanding bonuses ? (*Interruptions*)

HON. CHAIRPERSON: Please come straight to the demand.

SHRI KODIKUNNIL SURESH: I am coming to that point.

माननीय सभापति: अब आप समाप्त करें।

? (व्यवधान)

SHRI KODIKUNNILSURESH: They must be given other benefits that were denied to them due to closing down of cashew factories like additional benefits, loan waivers, medical facilities for all cashew workers irrespective of the last status of employment and premium payment.

माननीय सभापति: हम सभी को जीरो आवर की समय मर्यादा का सबको ध्यान रखना चाहिए। 15-20 सेकंड समय ऊपर हो सकता है, लेकिन मिनट्स में नहीं होना चाहिए।

? (व्यवधान)

