

Title: Difficulties faced by the jute growers due to non-payment of remunerative price of jute due to waiving of Jute Packaging norms and allowing non-jute materials of packaging purposes and steps taken by the Government in this matter.

Non-payment of remunerative price of jute due to waiving of Jute Packaging norms and allowing non-jute materials for packaging purposes

SHRI PRIYA RANJAN DASMUNSI (RAIGANJ): Sir, I call the attention of the Minister of Textiles to the following matter of urgent public importance and request that he may make a statement thereon:

" The difficulties being faced by the jute growers due to non-payment of remunerative price of jute and waiving of Jute Packaging norms and allowing non-jute materials for packaging purposes and steps taken by the Government in regard thereto. "

THE MINISTER OF TEXTILES (SHRI KASHIRAM RANA): Mr. Chairman, Sir, at the outset I would like to assure the hon. Members who have moved the notice for discussion on this matter, that the Government is well aware of the issues concerning jute sector and its importance in our country's economy. The Government has been taking various measures in the past not only to protect but also to facilitate the growth of this sector. We are also in the process of finalising certain policy initiatives as well as some new projects aimed at accelerating the growth of this sector.

With a view to enabling the jute farmers to get remunerative prices for their crop, the Government has a Minimum Support Price (MSP) policy. The Jute Corporation of India (JCI) established in 1971 implements the same. The MSP for TD 5 ex-Assam during 1998-99 was Rs.650 per quintal. The Government increased this to Rs.750 per quintal in 1990-2000 and further to Rs.785 per quintal in 2000-01. JCI has already entered the market and has purchased 25,600 quintals of raw jute under MSP so far. JCI operates 171 Centres in the jute growing areas. In addition, JCI is trying to increase purchases by tying up with cooperative societies and apex cooperative organisations of State Governments to increase the coverage of MSP operations.

As the main usage of jute has been in the form of packaging, this sector faced rough weather with the emergence of plastic as an alternative packaging material in 1980s. Hence, to protect the interests of those engaged in this sector, the Government enacted the Jute Packaging Materials Act, 1987 providing for compulsory use of jute in packaging of certain commodities. Orders issued under this Act on 1st July, 1999, and modified on 31st March, 2000, provided for packaging 90 per cent of foodgrains and sugar and 15 per cent of urea in jute bags.

The validity of the order which was to expire on 30th June, 2000 has been extended up to 30th September, 2000. The Government has not issued any new order for the Jute Year 2000-01. The Government intends to issue a new order before 30th September, 2000 after considering various factors like the size of the jute crop, the expected quantity of production of foodgrains and sugar, the impact of the introduction of 50 kg. bags in certain sectors, etc. The Government has been taking a balanced view in the matter, considering all aspects of the issue and keeping in mind interests of the jute farmers and workers engaged in the jute industry. I would like to assure the hon. Members of the House that their valuable suggestions will be kept in mind while deciding on the issue.

Sir, I hope the hon. Members would agree that the position explained by me clearly indicates that the Government is alive to the issues of the jute sector and is making all efforts to address these issues.

SHRI PRIYA RANJAN DASMUNSI : Mr. Chairman, Sir, first of all I do not agree with the Statement of the hon. Minister. I will justify my views on my own elaboration.

The economy of jute is not linked with a particular District or a particular part of India only. It is vitally linked with vast areas of North India, especially the rural villages of Bihar, eastern Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, entire West Bengal, Assam and Orissa. Jute-growers have now become victims of the policy the Government has adopted on 18th July, 2000 in the Cabinet Affairs Committee to change the whole packaging norms.

Sir, in 1987, when Rajiv Gandhi was the Prime Minister, I had the privilege to handle the desk of the Ministry of Commerce. I know how, in spite of the systematic and sustained pressure from the synthetic and the plastic lobby, we protected the interests of the jute growers and the jute industry at that time. The decision was there that the foodgrains were to be packed cent percent in jute bags. The sugar also used to be packed cent per cent in the jute bag. Even when the pressure was too much and the policy was revived, the urea used to be packed 80 per cent in jute bags.

Mr. Chairman, Sir, I understand that the Government has placed itself in a very peculiar situation now. The Minister of Environment from the same Government is talking that the synthetic and plastic bags are now causing great concern for the environment, for its toxic problems. And, the Minister here is sitting. He is fighting throughout the world, addressing seminars, symposium and giving lectures throughout the country as to what are the hazardous things so far as the environment is concerned. As per the environment protections as guaranteed by the WHO and also, at the Ministry's behest, in ITI Kharagpur, it was established and justified that how good is the jute fibre and how bad is the synthetic and plastic so far as pollution is concerned. In spite of that, the same Government, to take away the rights of the jute growers, to take away the future of the jute industrial workers and jute mills *per se*, has introduced a new Packaging Policy which is disastrous and dangerous.

MR. CHAIRMAN : Please ask the question.

SHRI PRIYA RANJAN DASMUNSI : Yes, Sir, I am coming to the question. If you go through the Calling Attention, it is linked with two subjects -- jute growers' interests and the packaging norm.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Normally, the rules permit for putting question in the Calling Attention.

SHRI PRIYA RANJAN DASMUNSI : Sir, I am coming to the question.

Sir, may I know from the hon. Minister the following?

I represent the district of Dinajpur which produces the best quality of the jute all over India. Whether it is a fact that last year in North Bengal, which produces large quantity of jute, the minimum price that was fixed by the growers was more than Rs. 900 and this time it is at Rs. 760, which is below the minimum support price. Sir, I come from the area where there is the best trading centre for jute growers , that is, Raiganj. There in the last week, the jute was sold at Rs. 760 whereas your MSP was at Rs. 785. Last year, they sold it at Rs. 985. In the South Bengal, the jute support price is Rs. 785 and it is now being sold at Rs. 720 because of the adverse affect of this.

The hon. Member from South Bengal, Hooghly is also sitting here. He also will bear me out as to what is happening there.

About the jute packaging norm, may I know from the hon. Minister that whether it is a fact that – he may kindly correct me if I am wrong -- there was no disruption in supply of jute bags for packing foodgrains and sugar as also fertilisers despite the short-lived jute strike? Even if the target of 212 million metric tonnes set for 2000-01 and 17.5 million metric tonnes for sugar is achieved, there will be no problem whatsoever in meeting the increment demand for jute goods as the jute industry has sufficient capacity. Will the hon. Minister therefore reply to us that this dilution of order even by 10 per cent will have an extremely harmful effects on the jute industry and its workers.?

This will force the mills to back production for over one lakh metric tonnes per year. Therefore, I seek the hon. Minister's intervention in the matter and I urge upon you to take up the matter at the level of the hon. Prime Minister or have another Cabinet Committee to ensure that 100 per cent packaging of foodgrains is ensured by the jute bags including sugar and 20 per cent for fertiliser as was before.

Please do not surrender to the synthetic and plastic lobby, which will destroy the farmers, the industrial workers and jute growers. The Agriculture Minister, Shri Nitish Kumar is sitting here. The State to which he belongs will be a major victim because the poorest of the poor from that State work in the jute mills of Calcutta and rest of the places in Bengal. The mill in Kishanganj is already closed and five more mills in Bengal are closed. Yet, the Government in which he is a Minister is changing the packaging norms – transferring from jute bags to synthetics and plastics.

With these words I conclude. I desire that the Minister will reply to these points. He said in his statement that he would consider our suggestions in good spirit. Will he consider these? Thank you.

SHRI RUPCHAND PAL (HOOGLY): Sir, I will directly come to the questions, as was suggested by you and as is the practice in the case of Calling Attention.

May I know the following from the hon. Minister?

1. Is it not a fact that the Standing Advisory Committee in its meeting, had unanimously come to the conclusion that the levels of reservation in respect of foodgrains and sugar should be restored to 100 per cent and fertiliser to 20 per cent, as before?
2. Is it not a fact that the Supreme Court had given some directions and this is the first time that the Union

Government is defying that direction of the Supreme Court?

3. Is it not a fact that there is no dearth of supply? Even the advance order would be completed by October, 2000, as 60 per cent of this advance order has already been fulfilled and the rest 40 per cent could be fulfilled any time. There is so much glut in the supply position.
4. Is it not a fact that jute industry is having enough capacity to fulfil any demand? Suppose the foodgrains target of 212 million tonnes is reached and if the sugar production is also reached as targeted by the Government – that is, 17.5 million metric tonnes – even then, the jute industry will be in a position to supply not only this, but also any incremental demands that may be there. This is true in the case of urea also.
5. Is it not a fact that world over, there is a rising demand for eco-friendly golden fibre packaging, particularly for foodgrains and sugar?
6. Is it not a fact that the synthetic lobby is mounting so much pressure that there is surrender by important quarters? I will illustrate it by giving one example. In the balance sheet of a very important Indian company, in the month of May, it came out saying that the Government is going to dilute the provisions of the 1987 Act and that they are not to go by the recommendations of the Standing Advisory Committee. I am not naming that company now.

In view of the statement made by the hon. Minister that he would take care of the suggestions, I would give my suggestions. Firstly, the hundred per cent mandatory use in respect of foodgrains and sugar should be restored forthwith, without waiting till 30th September. In the case of urea, it should be 20 per cent as it used to be. This will protect the economy of the whole of the Eastern India. Nearly a crore of people, -- workers, and jute growers -- are depended on that.

MR. CHAIRMAN : You can put your question. There cannot be a debate on this.

SHRI RUPCHAND PAL : Lastly, Sir, even the Jute Corporation of India is not purchasing. There is a sharp decline in the price of jute and it has come to even below Rs. 600 a quintal. So, the JCI is not going in for the purchase. It is saying that it does not have funds. So, it has closed down its operations. I suggest that the Government -- taking into account the importance of the jute industry and the interests of the jute growers -- should continue to have 100 per cent mandatory use in respect of foodgrains and sugar and 20 per cent in respect of urea, as it should be. Thank you.

SHRI PRIYA RANJAN DASMUNSI (RAIGANJ): Sir, in his reply, the Minister should say as to what was the situation prevailing before July and what is the situation now.

श्री काशीराम राणा : स्थापति जी, जूट और जूट पैकेजिंग एक्ट के बारे में जो बातें मुंशी जी और श्री रूप चन्द पाल ने कही हैं, सरकार भी जूट ग्राउर्स और जूट सेक्टर के बारे में उतनी ही चिन्तित है। मैं यह बात साफ करना चाहता हूँ कि सरकार ने जो भी निर्णय लिया है, वह कभी प्लास्टिक लॉबी के प्रेशर में नहीं लिया गया और न ही भविष्य में कोई ऐसा निर्णय लेंगे। यदि शुगर या ग्रेन के लिये पर्याप्त मात्रा में गनी बैग मिल जाते तो हम कभी जूट पैकेजिंग एक्ट को डायल्यूट नहीं करते। यह सही है जैसा श्री दासमुंशी ने कहा, यह एक्ट 1987 में बना और तब जो हालात थे, उसके हिसाब से परसेंटेज तय किया गया था। यह डायल्यूशन पहली बार नहीं किया गया है इससे पहले भी परसेंटेज कम किया गया था अभी भी हमने ग्रेन और शुगर का 100 प्रतिशत से 90 प्रतिशत किया है। जून 2000 में यह इसलिए किया था कि मिलों में स्ट्राइक हुई। हमने कहा था कि वैसे भी गनी बैग्स की बहुत शार्टेज है। ... (व्यवधान)

श्री रूप चन्दपाल : यह बात एकदम सही नहीं है।

SHRI PRIYA RANJAN DASMUNSI : I contest this point with responsibility. There is no shortage at all....(Interruptions)

SHRI RUPCHAND PAL : I am challenging the Minister. I can provide the data from the Government data. There is no shortage at all. ... (Interruptions)

SHRI PRIYA RANJAN DASMUNSI : I am challenging your Department with facts and figures. You have been wrongly informed by your officers. It is not a fact. ... (Interruptions)

SHRI RUPCHAND PAL : Any amount of gunny bag can be provided....(Interruptions)

MR. CHAIRMAN : You have drawn the attention of the Minister.

...(Interruptions)

SHRI RUPCHAND PAL : He is misleading the House....(Interruptions)

MR. CHAIRMAN: You have drawn his attention.

श्री काशी राम राणा : हमारे यहां चीनी का उत्पादन बढ़ रहा है।

श्री रूपचन्द पाल : आपका टारगेट पूरा करने के बाद भी जरूरत होगी तो जूट बैग्स मिल जाएंगे।

श्री काशी राम राणा : 1999-2000 में शुगर का प्रोडक्शन 17 मिलियन मीट्रिक टन हुआ था जो आज 18 मिलियन मीट्रिक टन है। वैसे ही ग्रेन का प्रोडक्शन जो पहले 200 मिलियन मीट्रिक टन था, वह 210 मिलियन मीट्रिक टन हुआ। ...*(व्यवधान)*

श्री रूपचन्द पाल (हुगली) : इंडस्ट्री की कैपेसिटी बताइए।

SHRI KASHIRAM RANA: Shri Rupchand Pal, kindly bear with me....*(Interruptions)*

MR. CHAIRMAN: He is in the Government. He seems to know better.

...*(Interruptions)*

SHRI PRIYA RANJAN DASMUNSI : We also know....*(Interruptions)*

MR. CHAIRMAN: You have drawn his attention and he is answering that.

...*(Interruptions)*

SHRI RUPCHAND PAL : A big company has come out with a balance sheet that the Government is going to ...*(Interruptions)* It has come out in the report....*(Interruptions)*

SHRI PRIYA RANJAN DASMUNSI : Only one company, called the Reliance, is ruling the economy of India.

श्री काशी राम राणा : इसीलिए हमारी जो जूट की रिक्वायरमेंट है, वह और भी बढ़ी है और अभी हमने जो पैकेजिंग एक्ट को डाइल्यूट किया है, वह इसलिए कि जूट पैकेजिंग की शार्टेज हो गई है। इसी तरह से एक और डायरेक्शन भी आई.एल.ओ. की ओर से दी गई कि 100 किलो के बैग्स को 50 किलो का बनाया जाये। इस सब को देखते हुए हमारे यहां जितने भी जूट बैग्स उपलब्ध हैं, उनका पूरा यूटीलाइजेशन करने की हमने कोशिश इस एक्ट के जरिये की है। एक सवाल हमारे सामने और भी है। जो एम.एस.पी. के बारे में बताया गया, जैसा माननीय सांसद दासमुंशी जी ने बताया है। *(व्यवधान)*

श्री प्रियरंजन दासमुंशी : आप कृपा करके इतनी सूचना और दीजिए कि प्रपोज़नेट राइज इन एम.एस.पी. ऑफ कॉटन कितनी है और प्रपोज़नेट राइज ऑफ जूट कितना है ?

श्री काशीराम राणा : हमारी एम.एस.पी. जो 2000-2001 में तय हुई थी, वह 785 रुपये है। मैं यह बात कहना चाहता हूँ कि पहले जो एम.एस.पी. तय की गई थी, हर साल 20-30 रुपये करते थे, लेकिन पिछले दो साल से जो हमारे गरीब जूट ग्रोअर्स हैं, उनको ध्यान में रखते हुए हमने इसे 80 से 100 रुपये बढ़ाने की कोशिश की है, जो 1998-99 में *(व्यवधान)*

MR. CHAIRMAN : You have not given the notice. Please resume your seat. Only those Members who have given notices are entitled to ask questions.

THE MINISTER OF PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS AND MINISTER OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRI PRAMOD MAHAJAN): Even if he has given notice, he cannot go on asking twenty questions....*(Interruptions)*

श्री तरित बरण तोपदार (बैरकपुर) : उसका इस्तेमाल कैसे होगा।

श्री काशीराम राणा : 1998-99 में एम.एस.पी. 650 रुपये था।

MR. CHAIRMAN: When I called your name, you were absent.

...*(Interruptions)*

MR. CHAIRMAN: Please allow the Minister to complete his answer.

श्री काशीराम राणा : 1999-2000 में हमने उसको सौ रुपये बढ़ाकर 750 रुपये कर दिया। हमने इसमें सौ रुपये बढ़ाने की कोशिश की है, क्योंकि हम जानते हैं कि जूट ग्रोअर्स को और ज्यादा मिलना चाहिए। जहां तक जे.सी.आई. का ताल्लुक है, उसके बारे में हमने बताया है कि आज बंगाल हो, बिहार हो, 171 सैण्टर्स उन्होंने खोले हैं। *(व्यवधान)*

MR. CHAIRMAN: Shri Pal, this is only a Calling Attention. You have to call the attention of the Minister.

...*(Interruptions)*

SHRI PRIYA RANJAN DASMUNSI : Sir, the JCI do not have funds to operate....*(Interruptions)*

MR. CHAIRMAN: If the hon. Member wants to help the Minister, he may go and sit behind him.

...(Interruptions)

MR. CHAIRMAN: When I called your name, you were absent. The Minister has now started replying.

श्री तरित बरण तोपदार (बैरकपुर) : एम.एस.पी. का कोई मतलब नहीं बनता है, अगर जे.सी.आई. का फंक्शन ही नहीं चलता है। इसको बदलना पड़ेगा।

श्री काशीराम राणा : जूट कारपोरेशन ऑफ इंडिया मिनिमम सपोर्ट प्राइस से भी 20-30 रुपये ज्यादा देता है। मैं तो माननीय सांसदों को अपील करूंगा कि जिस प्रकार से कॉटन में गुजरात या महाराष्ट्र गवर्नमेंट ने अपने जितने परचेज सेंटर्स खोले हैं, ताकि कॉटन ग्राउंसे को ज्यादा दाम मिले, इसके लिए वे सेंटर खोलते हैं, मैं तो बंगाल सरकार को अपील करूंगा कि अगर सरकार के दिल में सही मायने में जूट ग्राउंसे का हित है, इंटरैस्ट है तो उन्हें खुद के सेंटर खोलकर ज्यादा दाम देकर इसकी खरीद करनी चाहिए।

श्री प्रियरंजन दासमुंशी : लेकिन जे.सी.आई. तो आपका है।

श्री रूपचन्द पाल : अगर प्रान्तीय सरकार ही सब कुछ करेगी तो आपकी ज़रूरत क्या है ?

MR. CHAIRMAN: The Minister is giving the reply. You cannot dictate the answer.

...(Interruptions)

SHRI RUPCHAND PAL : Sir, he is only misleading the House....(Interruptions)

MR. CHAIRMAN: You have been given an opportunity to put question and now the Minister is replying.

SHRI RUPCHAND PAL : Sir, he is only adding to the confusion and is misleading the House.

श्री तरित बरण तोपदार : राणा जी, स्टेट गवर्नमेंट ने आपको कोई सूचना दी है ?

श्री काशीराम राणा : वह योजना तो राज्य सरकार को बना लेनी चाहिए।

MR. CHAIRMAN: You may resume your seat. You cannot speak now. When I called your name, you were absent. You have now lost your chance. You must follow the rules.

...(Interruptions)

SHRI TARIT BARAN TOPDAR : I seek your protection....(Interruptions)

श्री काशीराम राणा : एक सवाल रूपचन्द पाल जी ने यह भी किया है कि स्टैंडिंग कमेटी का डिस्मिशन था, मैं कहना चाहूंगा कि स्टैंडिंग कमेटी ने जो डिस्मिशन लिया, वह तो एक रिकमेंडेशन होती है, उसमें भी 10 परसेंट से 20 परसेंट की फ्लेक्सिबिलिटी उन्होंने रिकमेंड की है।

श्री रूपचन्द पाल : वह कोई कारण रहने से की है, लेकिन अभी ऐसा कोई कारण नहीं है।

SHRI RUPCHAND PAL (HOOGLY): Sir, the Minister is misleading the House.

SHRI PRAMOD MAHAJAN: Do not get misled.

श्री रूपचन्द पाल : वह लास्ट में लिखा है, लेकिन अभी तो ऐसा कोई रीजन नहीं है।

श्री काशीराम राणा : माननीय सदस्यों के द्वारा जो भी सवाल उठाए गए हैं, मुझे लगता है मैंने जो स्टेटमेंट पहले पढ़ा है, उसमें इन सभी के जवाब देने की कोशिश की है। यह पैकेजिंग एक्ट का डायल्यूशन है, जब शार्टेज हुई तब, मैं याद दिलाना चाहता हूं अपने साथियों को मई-जून महीने में, सरकार की इच्छा क्या थी? (व्यवधान)

MR. CHAIRMAN : Shri Rupchand Pal, kindly follow the procedure. You are a senior Member.

श्री प्रियरंजन दासमुंशी : हमारा जो सुझाव है, क्या उस पर गौर करेंगे ?

श्री काशीराम राणा : जब हड़ताल हुई थी, उससे पहले सरकार के पास अधिकार था दस प्रतिशत फ्लेक्सिबिलिटी का, फिर भी सरकार ने यूज नहीं किया, क्योंकि हम जूट ग्राउंसे को पूरा प्रोटेक्ट करना चाहते थे। मुझे लगता है जो परिस्थिति पैकेजिंग में है? (व्यवधान)

MR. CHAIRMAN: You have to be contended with his answer. This is a Constitutional position. Once he says something, it has to be accepted.

...(Interruptions)

MR. CHAIRMAN: You cannot contest his answer. When a Minister is replying, you cannot interrupt. You cannot

contest his answer.

श्री रूपचंद पाल : यही सरकार करने जा रही है, यही कर रही है। (व्यवधान)

श्री काशीराम राणा : मैं यहां एक आश्वासन देना चाहता हूँ कि जूट ग्राउन्स को जैसे भी प्रोटेक्ट करने की बात आएगी, सरकार इस बारे में कभी पीछे नहीं हटेगी और जितना मिलना चाहिए, उससे अधिक देने की कोशिश करेगी।

MR. CHAIRMAN: You have been allowed to raise an issue and it has been answered by the hon. Minister.

Now, the House shall take up next item on the agenda, namely, Matters under Rule 377.

15.32 hrs.