Title: Need to safeguard the interests of tea growers of Nilgiris district of Tamil Nadu- Laid.

*SHRI P.H. PANDIYAN (TIRUNELVELI): Sir, there are four lakh strong small tea growers and agriculturists in Nilgiris district of Tamil Nadu. Recently, the Central Government reduced the basic customs duty to 7.5 per cent on tea imported from Sri Lanka. Due to the reduction in customs duty, the tea growers of Nilgiris district are very much affected. They are agitating for the last several months for fixing the floor price as Rs.15/- per kilogram for green tea.

The tea growers of Nilgiris district are already distressed by the failure of monsoon. The Central Government which enhanced the basic customs duty on tea from 15 per cent to 35 per cent as per the World Trade Organisation Agreement suddenly reduced it on tea imported from Sri Lanka alone to 7.5 per cent. It is against the interests of tea growers of Nilgiris district of Tamil nadu. A day's strike and *dharna* was organised by the tea growers to mark the protest against it. The Tamil Nadu Government assured to form a Committee to look into the problems of tea growers of Nilgiris district in Tamil Nadu but nothing has been done so far. The tea growers from Nilgiris district met the hon. Prime Minister, the Finance Minister and the Commerce Minister to represent their problems. But instead of solving their problems the Central Government effected the reduction on basic customs duty for tea imported from Sri Lank from 12th May, 2000.

* Treated as laid on the Table of the House.

I request the Central Government to totally ban the import of tea from Sri Lanka and other countries. In order to protect the interests of tea growers in Nilgiris district a floor price of Rs.15/- per kilogram should be fixed for green tea. Tea dust for the Indian Army, public sector undertakings and other Government agencies should likewise be procured from the tea growers of Nilgiris district. All steps should be taken to market tea dust in the Government's Co-operative Marketing outfits.