

Title: Demand to discuss the problems of farmers and the stand of the Government of India in the WTO Conference to be held in November, 2001 in Togo.

SHRI P.C. THOMAS (MUVATTUPUZHA): Sir, the Fourth Ministerial Conference of WTO is going to be held in November in Togo. Be it wheat, be it rice, be it rubber, be it pepper, be it coconut, be it oil seeds, be it mustard, be it even other vegetables and everything, the farmers of India are in great distress. There are some agreements relating to agriculture, which are going to be amended. I would like to say that there is an imminent need for a clear discussion on the issue because the Government should take up the issue very seriously before the WTO when the Conference is going to be held in November in Togo. It concerns all the State Governments and also the Government of India. The Government of India's representatives, I am told, have already taken steps in this regard but we would also like to be informed. The House, which is supreme, should be informed in this regard, and we should get an opportunity to say what the people feel about it. So, we should have a full-fledged discussion in this regard. I would also say one word with regard to the feelings of some of the farmers.

...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: Shri Varkala Radhakrishnan, do you also want to speak on this subject?

SHRI VARKALA RADHAKRISHNAN (CHIRAYINKIL): Yes.

MR. SPEAKER: Shri Varkala Radhakrishnan, you can also associate with what Shri P.C. Thomas has said. The Government is also going to reply.

...(Interruptions)

SHRI VARKALA RADHAKRISHNAN : I am waiting all along for this. I shall give my own version. As a Member, that is my right....(Interruptions)

SHRI P.C. THOMAS : Former Speaker, Sir, I am on my legs.

I would suggest that before having a full-fledged discussion, if a meeting of the representatives of all Parties can be called, that will be good enough. But anyway, we should have a discussion. I would also submit that the farmers who are cultivating rubber and coconut are in great distress. In my State, the main cultivation is rubber and coconut.

MR. SPEAKER: Shri Thomas, please understand this is not a debate. This is 'Zero Hour'. You can mention it in two minutes' time and get the information from the Government. What is this?

SHRI P.C. THOMAS : The farmers are in real distress. With regard to rubber, I would specifically say that it has been taken up as an industrial produce while it is actually an agricultural produce. ...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: This will not go on record.

(Interruptions) € *

SHRI VARKALA RADHAKRISHNAN : Sir, I have only one point to submit. ...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: You can associate yourself with what he has said.

...(Interruptions)

* Not Recorded

SHRI VARKALA RADHAKRISHNAN : There is a decision by the Kerala High Court in this respect. The decision is that as per the provisions of the Rubber Act, the Central Government is directed to declare a floor price. That has not been done so far. That is also to be done. ...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: You can only associate with him. Please take your seat.

...(Interruptions)

THE MINISTER OF PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS AND MINISTER OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRI PRAMOD MAHAJAN): Sir, the hon. Member Shri P.C. Thomas has raised an important issue about the WTO Conference and said that India should take a stand that would protect the interests of Indian farmers. From the Government side, I would say that I entirely agree with him. I will communicate his feelings to the Minister of Commerce and Industry that the hon. Minister, before the November Conference, should have wider consultations with political parties, leaders and State Governments in formulating the Indian stand. At the same time, I totally agree that this House should also discuss this subject.

This Conference is to be held in November. I think, it would be before the Winter Session. So, before this Session ends, it would be better if we discussed what stand India should take in the WTO Conference for protecting the interests of Indian farmers and Indian industries. I am very keen that this discussion should take place in this House so that the Government can create a consensus and also get the guidance of all hon. Members.