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Title : Import of contaminated wheat from Australia.

SHRI B. MAHTAB (CUTTACK): Thank you, Mr. Deputy-Speaker Sir. I draw the attention of this House through, this Special Mention, to a very important issue.

While the international quality parameters are being tightened the world over to ensure that invasive alien species do not use the vehicle of commodity trade to enter into a country, why is our Government going head over heels by relaxing the quality norms and opening the floodgates to noxious weeds, deadly insects, pests and dreaded plant diseases?

Bending backwards to allow the highly contaminated wheat shipments from Australia, the Food and Agriculture Ministry has turned a blind eye to the presence of 14 weeds, two fungal diseases and one insect pest that the import consignment contains. The first consignment of 50,000 tonnes of wheat (of the total contracted five lakh tonnes) from Australia has already arrived at Chennai Port in the last week of April and the rest is arriving this month, that is, in the month of July. Of the 14 weeds, 11 species are not found in India.

Interestingly, while Australia has accepted that its wheat shipment contains these weeds, the Food and Agriculture Ministry had sought a certificate from the importing country saying that the imports are "essentially free from weeds". At the time of tender, the requirement was "free from weeds". That was mentioned at that time. Why has Food and Agriculture Ministry overruled the objections raised by the Plant Quarantine Directorate to import of exotic weed species and has relaxed the provisions of Plant Quarantine Order 2003?

With the trade in agricultural commodities subsequently brought under the World Trade Organisation, Plant, Food, Seed Order 1989 has been replaced by the more stringent Plant Quarantine Order 2003. Even this Plant Quarantine Order 2003 was later amended to reduce the number of alien weeds that pose a threat from 61 to 31.

The shipment also brings in two fungal diseases, that is, dwarf bunt and Ergot. Both these diseases are not known to afflict wheat in India.

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: What is your demand?

SHRI B. MAHTAB : Sir, I am coming to that.

I would like to know from the Government whether to accommodate not only Australian wheat, the Agriculture Ministry is also changing its Plant Quarantine laws to make it easy for the United States, Ukraine and Argentina to export its sub-standard wheat?