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Title: Problems being faced by the Beedi workers in Kerala.

SHRI P. KARUNAKARAN (KASARGOD): Hon. Speaker, Sir, I would like to invite the attention of the hon. Labour Minister and the Labour Ministry, through you, to an important problem.

The miserable conditions of beedi workers in Kerala are really known to all. Lakhs of people are working and depending on this industry. Ninety-nine per cent of these workers are women. They are getting very low wages. An amendment passed by the last Parliament, due to a court order, has reduced the employment opportunities of these beedi workers to a great extent. There should be separation of functions of the beedi and cigarette workers in order to give assistance to beedi workers.

Some welfare measures have already been implemented to the beedi workers. But as far as the State of Kerala is concerned, its special situation has to be taken into account. With regard to ESI hospitals, there are no doctors at all. Though there are hospitals, there are no doctors to serve the people. With regard to construction of houses, the authorities are saying that there should be group housing, which is impossible in Kerala. It is because the beedi workers go to the factories from the villages. In the evening they go to their homes. For getting a small land, they should pay high prices. So, a limit of Rs. 1 lakh has to be increased. They give Rs. 30,000 to every person. But there is no need to fix the ceiling at Rs. 1 lakh. They should not limit that the beedi workers should construct the houses only within the cost of Rs. 1 lakh. They are not going to construct big houses. So, this assistance can be given to all. The third point that I would like to make is with regard to excise duty.

MR. SPEAKER: Mention the points only.

SHRI P. KARUNAKARAN (KASARGOD): As far as the beedi industry is concerned, the rate of excise duty is unlike other industries. For every one thousand beedis that they are producing, they have to pay Rs. 9. They have to pay thrift fund, welfare fund and Gujarat calamity fund.

MR. SPEAKER: Just mention the issue.

SHRI P. KARUNAKARAN : At least that one rupee can be avoided.

With regard to total production of beedi, 20 lakhs is the limit. If it is curtailed, then the cooperative societies will be benefited. The private owners are really giving no accounts to the Government. They are really misleading the Government. These cooperative societies give the accounts clearly. They have to give high taxes. At the same time they have to compete with them. So, the Government should take these measures for the welfare of beedi workers.

SHRI DUSHYANT SINGH (JHALAWAR): Sir, I would like to thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak on a very important issue.

MR. SPEAKER: Utilise it.