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Title: Problems being faced by small tea growers.

SHRI R. PRABHU (NILGIRIS): I would like to bring to the attention of the Government, especially of the Minister of Commerce and the Minister of Finance, to the pitiable plight of the small tea growers. In this country, we have nearly 2 lakh small tea growers who have less than one hectare or 1.5 hectares of land and they have small tea plantations. There are 65 thousand such people in my constituency and others are in Darjeeling and Assam. This is the true small scale industry of the tea sector. They have been getting unremunerative prices and they have been suffering for the last many years. For the last three years now, we have been requesting the Ministry of Commerce and the Ministry of Finance to give them a statutory minimum support price of Rs. 10 per kilogram of green tea leaves. The break even point is around Rs. 8 and even today, they are getting five and a half rupees or six rupees per kilogram of green leaves. Now, they are suffering. They are committing suicides. They are facing many hardships. They are not able to send their children to schools. They are not able to have medical facilities or anything. I would urge upon the Government, as they have the power under the Tea Control Order of 1953 to fix maximum or minimum price for tea, that they have to fix the minimum price of tea and tea leaves which they sell.

You know, Sir, this Government has passed a very far-reaching National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme under the guidance of Madam Sonia Gandhi. Our traditional industries in this country are plantations, textiles, sugar and all agro-based industries. Here, by killing these industries, we are reducing employment. On the one hand, we are trying to give employment and on the other hand we are reducing it. So, I would urge upon the Government to look into this. Mr. Kamal Nath, Commerce and Industry Minister, while speaking at an UPASI function last September, had assured the small tea growers there that he would ensure a statutory minimum support price for them.