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Title: Regarding drought-relief subsidy to small tea growers. *

SHRI P. VISWANATHAN (KANCHEEPURAM): Mr. Chairman, Sir, thank you very much for giving me a chance. I request you to allow me to speak from here.

Sir, this is a very important issue. This morning, the House discussed a very important issue in the 'Zero Hour'. The hon. Opposition Leader, Madam Sushma Swaraj raised the very important issue of Ganga Yamuna River Project development. This morning, the House had given much importance to that subject also. I want the House to give the same importance to a very important issue of drought relief subsidy to the small tea growers. The hon. Finance Minister has shown much concern in his Budget for the year 2013-14 to uplift the farming community in the country. As a member of the Tea Board, representing the Lok Sabha on behalf of the tea industry, I convey our thanks to the hon. Finance Minister on his efforts to bring the right climate for investment in the industry.

As a logical extension, I would like to brush the memory of the hon. Finance Minister regarding the need to implement investments already sanctioned and recommended by the Tea Board. In particular, nearly 1.5 lakh small growers in the country are awaiting for the release of Rs.300 crore for the Small Growers Development Programme recommended by the Tea Board under the 12th Five Year Plan.

The noval wing called the Directorate of Small Tea Growers' Welfare has already been approved by the Tea Board and the Government of India. As is well known, one year, that is, the first year of the 12th Plan, has already expired and hence there is an emergent need to hasten the services of this Directorate so that the growers get immediate benefits, including the subsidies and grants.

Most parts of the country are commonly passing through the drought. In the Nilgiris, tea factories, belonging to small scale sector, are functioning only for three days a week and that too just for one shift a day because of inadequate arrival of green tea leaves and raw material. It is because of the drought that the total tea production has come down by 60 per cent. This means the income of the factory owners, small growers and farm labour has eroded drastically.

Now is the time when the Government stood by the side of the growers by giving some drought relief subsidy through the Centre-operated sectors, like tea, as part of the Budget concern to address drought. In short, a drought relief subsidy through Tea Board, particularly to small tea growers, is the immediate need.