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Title: Need to eliminate the practice of bonded labour and to rehabilitate the victims.

SHRI FEROZE VARUN GANDHI (SULTANPUR): Sir, bonded labour is the most widespread form of slavery in the world. A person becomes a bonded labour when unable to repay a loan, he is said to be owned by the feudal lord or money lender in question till the loan is repaid.

As per recent statistics available with the International Labour Organisation (ILO), 36 million people in the world are bonded labourers and 16 million of them are in India itself, which is a shameful statistics.

Recently, I have read about the extraction of coal in private coal mines in the Jaintia Hills in Meghalaya, which is almost exclusively undertaken by what we now call bonded labourer. In States like Punjab, it is not uncommon to employ labours in brick kilns against loan. In States like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar large portions of land are still held by families who practice feudal forms of ownership, and there are still lots and lots of workers that work as bonded labourer.

Even 39 years after the Parliament having passed the Bonded Labour (Abolition) Act making it a criminal offence, it still exists. Just last month, the National Adivasi Solidarity Council rescued 106 Chenchu tribals of Odisha from the clutches of creditors in Mahbubnagar. In another incident, 40 workers who hailed from different regions of Eastern UP were rescued after a year of bonded labour from a brick kiln in Phillaur in Punjab who owed just Rs. 600 – Rs. 700.

The Central and State Governments claimed to have spent Rs. 2 billion on their rehabilitation, but there is a fundamental problem. They give Rs. 20,000 only after the conviction of the felon who has induced bonded labour upon these people and just Rs. 2,000 after the release. Now, what happens is that recidivism occurs. They fall back into bonded labour because there is no skill training. The amount was said to be increased to Rs. 1,00,000, but even that is on the conviction of the felon. Now, in our country, conviction takes at least 3-4 years, which means that at that time with no support base, the person without a cushion, falls back into bonded labour.

Sir, I have got a basic suggestion. Let us remove the condition of conviction clause from this. Let the person be given Rs. 1,00,000 upon immediate rescue; skill training should be involved in this; and accommodation and food should be borne by the Government during the skill training.

Lastly, till now, only 18 out of 29 States follow the rehabilitation scheme for the release of funds for rehabilitation. So, substantial proportion of funds remains unspent. This is a grave human concern. I beg your indulgence in the matter. Thank you, Sir.

HON. DEPUTY-SPEAKER:

Shri Sharad Tripathi,

Shri Jagdambika Pal,

Kunwar Pushpendra Singh Chandel and

Shri Ajay Misra Teni are permitted to associate with the issue raised by Shri Feroze Varun Gandhi.