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Title: Need to provide relief to rubber growers of Kerala.

SHRI JOSE K. MANI (KOTTAYAM) : For more than 2 years the rubber plantation sector has been reeling under a crisis of confidence triggered by crash in prices in domestic market. Indiscriminate imports of natural rubber under the OGL from overseas markets where prices consistently are below Indian domestic prices have forced the Indian rubber growers to think of switching over to other crops. The rubber plantation sector is sustaining the livelihood of more than 12 million farmers mostly small and marginal in Central Kerala. For generations, rubber has been a boon and saviour for the farming community in Central Kerala. Post WTO and FTAs, the domestic rubber farmer is facing a crisis of sorts, sitting on the verge of ruin and starvation. There have been no enduring relief measures taken by the Centre towards stabilizing the domestic market for natural rubber.

Centre's intransigence over the issue, has brought the State Government of Kerala to centre-stage with a provision of Rs. 500 crores in the recently presented State Budget towards providing subsidy relief to distressed rubber farmers. Notwithstanding the State Government's gesture of ad-hoc support to rubber farmers in the State, the Centre should also chip in by announcing immediate measures to provide enduring relief to the farmers through a slew of measures:

Calibrating the import policy for natural rubber on short-term basis in tune with international market price movements;

Reactivating the Rubber Board through re-constitution to its envisaged full strength; and

Early adoption of Natural Rubber Policy after consultations with stake-holders.