

P>**Title:** Requests the Central Government to exclude the items like tea, rubber, coffee, coir products, coconut spices to be sold in duty free market in India under 'Indo-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement'.

MR. SPEAKER: Now, the House will take up 'Zero Hour'. Shri Vaiko.

... (Interruptions)

DR. SUBRAMANIAN SWAMY (MADURAI): Sir, I had also given a notice.

MR. SPEAKER: I am going by the list before me.

DR. SUBRAMANIAN SWAMY : My name must also be on the list.

1203 hrs (Mr. Deputy-Speaker in the Chair)

SHRI VAIKO (SIVAKASI): Sir, thank you very much for permitting me to raise a very important issue during the 'Zero Hour'.

I would draw the attention of the Government to a very serious problem which has caused a grave concern in the minds of the farmers, agriculturists, particularly in the Southern States, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka.

According to the Indo-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement, it has been proposed that out of 5,100 items, 1,000 items will be included for duty free market. (Interruptions).

Sir, if rubber, tea, coffee, coir products, coconut and spices particularly cardamom, are imported duty free, it will totally destroy the farmers and the planters.

I understand that according to the agreement, 28th February is going to be the last date for finalisation of the negative list of items. Unless these items like tea, rubber, coffee, coir products, coconut spices, etc. are included in that negative list, it will totally ruin them and a devastating effect will be there. (Interruptions).

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: There is a lot of noise in the House. Silence please.

DR. SUBRAMANIAN SWAMY : The whose noise is coming from the Congress Party.(Interruptions).

SHRI VAIKO (SIVAKASI): It is a very serious issue. Thousands and thousands of families will be left on the streets, in a lurch. A lot of people depend on these items. For example, tea growers sell tea in the market at a price of ) But when it is imported from Sri Lanka duty free, it will be sold at Rs.35-40 and that will definitely close down all the prospects of exports.

In our country, particularly in the Southern States, we produce more than what we need for the domestic consumption. Therefore, we depend upon the exports and particularly in Tamil Nadu we are going in for large scale coconut plantations. And then if we import from Sri Lanka, as they have developed the modern technology, it will be very difficult to compete with them.

I do not understand the rationale that compelled the Government to go in for a Free Trade Agreement and including these items to be put in the duty free list, without taking into consideration how much damage will be caused to the farmers, the agriculturists, planters and also the employees who depend upon these tea, rubber, coconut and coffee plantations.

It is a painful paradox that in the 18th and the 19th Centuries thousands and thousands of labourers went to Sri Lanka. Through their sweat and labour they brought the rubber plantation and one fine morning with the stroke of a pen six lakh people were brought here as refugees. These very same people are dependant upon these plantations.

Therefore, the economy of the Southern States, particularly of the farmers in Kerala, Tamil Nadu -- especially the Nilgiris and the Kanyakumari districts -- and Karnataka will be affected. It will totally ruin their future.

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: What do you want the Central Government to do?

SHRI VAIKO : Therefore, the Government should include these items in the negative list. (Interruptions)

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Shri Vaiko, yesterday also many hon. Members had given notices. What I am saying is that today also we have a long list. You briefly put your matter and then ask what you want the Government to do. You put your final question.

SHRI VAIKO : Now only three days are there for the 28th February, the last date for finalisation of the list of the negative items. These items should be included in the list of negative items.

Therefore, I request the Government to have a meeting on this vital issue, with the Members of Parliament of the Southern States cutting across party lines and discuss the matter with them. The Government should also make a statement on this very serious issue. (Interruptions)

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Shri Vaiko, the Government wants to react to it.

..... (Interruptions)

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Some other hon. Members also have given notice.

SHRI K. KARUNAKARAN (THIRUVANANTHAPURAM): The Prime Minister should make a statement on this issue.

SHRI VAIKO : Sir, the hon. Minister wanted to react; let him react.

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Shri Karunakaran also has given a notice on the same matter. I am asking him to speak.

>SHRI K. KARUNAKARAN : The farmers of Kerala are in real panic. Kerala is the one State where the economy will be very much adversely affected. The agricultural community in Kerala is very much worried due to this agreement. The items mentioned are coconut, rubber, cardamom, etc. These are produced both in Sri Lanka and in India. Kerala is producing the same products. Unfortunately, not only we are worried about the import from Sri Lanka, but also there is every possibility of other countries operating through Sri Lanka, and then, the products come to India. That will very much adversely affect the farmers of this country. My personal request is that the Prime Minister himself should intervene, sort out this and find out some solution.

SHRI N.K. PREMCHANDRAN (QUILON): We all support.

>THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS, MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS AND MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PLANNING AND PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION (SHRI RAM NAIK): The hon. Members have raised an important issue. I will convey the sentiments expressed by the Members to the Commerce Minister.... (Interruptions)

SHRI VAIKO : The Commerce Minister should come and make a statement here.

... (Interruptions)

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Shri Vaiko, this is Zero Hour. You have raised the matter and the Government has reacted to it. Do not waste the time of the House. Otherwis, we will not be in a position to finish.

... (Interruptions)

SHRI E. AHAMED (MANJERI): Sir, you can direct the Minister to make a statement.

... (Interruptions)

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Shri Ahamed, he has already reacted.

SHRI N.K. PREMCHANDRAN : Sir, 28th February is the last date.

SHRI VAIKO (SIVAKASI): The Commerce Minister should come forward to make a statement here. He should make a statement here.

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: He has already reacted. What more you want?

SHRI N.K. PREMCHANDRAN : Sir, 28th February is the last date.

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: In Zero Hour, whenever you take up a matter, the Government reacts. That means, the Government has taken note of it. Do not waste the time of the House.

SHRI VAIKO : The Commerce Minister should come forward to make a statement.