

THE MINISTER OF PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS AND MINISTER OF FOOD AND CIVIL SUPPLIES (SHRI H.K.L. BHAGAT): Though the matter is very urgent, it may be postponed because the opposition is absent and the mover, Shri Indrajit Gupta, is also absent. Now, the House may take up Item No. 14. This discussion may be taken up some time later.

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Do the hon. Members agree with the suggestion of the hon. Minister?

SEVERAL HON. MEMBERS: Yes.

16.40 hrs.

COCONUT DEVELOPMENT BOARD (AMENDMENT) BILL

[English]

THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE (DR. G.S. DHILLON): I beg to move:

"That the Bill further to amend the Coconut Development Board Act, 1979, as passed by Rajya Sabha, be taken into consideration."

Before I request the hon. House to consider the Coconut Development Board (Amendment) Bill, 1987 which was introduced in the Budget Session, I might briefly give the background and reasons which necessitated bringing forward this amending legislation.

The purport of this Bill is only to make an amendment in the Coconut Development Board Act, 1979 under which the Coconut Development Board was set up, with a view to including the Horticulture Commissioner, who is looking after the activities of the Board in the Ministry of Agriculture as *ex officio* member of the Board.

When the Coconut Development Board Act was enacted in 1979, horticulture and plantation crops were dealt with in the

Crops Division headed by Agriculture Commissioner in the Department of Agriculture and Cooperation and, accordingly, he was included as an *ex officio* member of the Board. Meanwhile with the importance that the horticultural programmes have acquired over the years and their contribution to the national economy, a separate full-fledged Division known as Horticulture Division headed by Horticulture Commissioner, has been created.

As the work of coconut development at the national level and that of the Coconut Development Board is being looked after by the Horticulture Commissioner, it is necessary that he may be made an *ex officio* member of the Board in place of Agriculture Commissioner. The inclusion of Horticulture Commissioner will be of considerable assistance in providing technical supervision and guidance in the process of organising the programmes and activities of the Board.

The Bill, therefore, seeks to achieve this object by amending sub-section (4) (b) of section 4 of the Coconut Development Board Act, 1979.

Having given the broad purport of the Bill and the amendment sought being of a minor nature, I now request the Honourable House to consider the Bill.

It is a very simple Bill. Earlier there was only Crop Division but now there is a specific Horticulture Division. So, we wish that the Agriculture Commissioner may be replaced by the Horticulture Commissioner.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Motion moved:

"That the Bill further to amend the Coconut Development Board Act, 1979, as passed by Rajya Sabha, be taken into consideration."

Shri Vakkom Purushothaman.

SHRI VAKKOM PURUSHOTHAMAN (Alleppey): Sir, as the hon. Minister has just now said, this Bill is introduced with the limited object of making the Horticulture Commissioner an *ex officio* member of the Coconut Development Board in place of the Agriculture Commissioner. Since the coconut cultivation and even the administration of the Coconut Development Board are looked after by the Horticulture Commissioner, it is necessary that he be included as a member of the Board. So, I support this amendment Bill. But, Sir, being a member elected to the Coconut Development Board by this House and also a Member coming from Kerala, the land of coconuts, I would like to say a few words before this House, especially for the notice of the hon. Minister.

Sir, I was a Minister for Agriculture in my State for about six years from 1971 to 1977. It was during this period that the Kerala Government had repeatedly represented before the Government of India for the formation of this Coconut Development Board. When the then Agriculture Minister visited Kerala to attend a seminar organised by Karshaka Congress, a farmers wing of Indian National Congress, he had agreed to the constitution of this Board and he had openly announced this in the seminar then and there. But the Act was passed only in 1979 and the Board started functioning only in 1981. The very purpose of our repeated representations during that period was to help the poor coconut cultivators of that State.

Coconut is the main agricultural crop in Kerala. More than half of the entire cultivated area of coconut in the country is in Kerala. Every bit of land cultivated by the agriculturists in Kerala is having at least a good number of coconut trees, except in big plantations. Even the poor beneficiaries of the land reforms—the Adakudi tenant turned land owner of ten cents of land—are also coconut growers in the State. The entire economy of the State is mainly dependent on the coconut and coconut cultivation. But recently some of

the other States have also started planting coconut, in Tamil Nadu, in Karnataka and even in Assam, in limited areas. But the economy of any of these States is not dependent on coconut.

SHRI P. KOLANDAIVELU (Gobichetti-palayam): Because of monsoon.

SHRI VAKKOM PURUSHOTHAMAN: Whatever be the reason. But even after the formation of the Coconut Development Board, there are so many teething troubles since it is in the initial stage. Apart from that, the first Chairman was ill; but he continued there in that post till his death. Now, there is no Chairman for the Board for the last so many months. The Government of India should appoint a Chairman as early as possible. *(Interruptions)*

No, I do not want. I am not parochial. I am first an Indian and second only a 'Keralaiyan'. I honestly believe in it. But I am bound to safeguard, and argue for the interests of the Kerala people.

Coconut-cultivation is our monopoly cultivation. Only people from Kerala can understand the delicate problems of coconut cultivation. So, I request the Hon. Minister that somebody from Kerala should be appointed as the Chairman of the Coconut Development Board. I hope that the hon. Minister knows why I harp on this point so vehemently *(Interruptions)*. That is why I said, I am first an Indian and second only a 'Keralaiyan'. Coconut cultivation is our monopoly cultivation. Every where in Kerala we have got coconut. Nowhere else in the country it is so. *(Interruptions)*

That is why I say I am not concerned with the persons. You can appoint anybody, but he must be a man knowing the obligations and delicate problems of the coconut cultivation.

Our beloved Prime Minister knows the importance of coconut cultivation in Kerala and that is why he has announced a special grant of Rs. 23 crores for coconut

[Shri Vakkom Purushothaman]

development in Kerala. While making that announcement he has referred to coconut as an oilseed. But the Government of India is reluctant to declare coconut as an oilseed. I think that the Government of India task force on oilseeds has not recognised coconut as an oilseed crop.

PROF. N.G. RANGA (Guntur): It is an oilseed crop.

SHRI VAKKOM PURUSHOTHAMAN: The Coconut Development Board in its last meeting passed unanimously the following resolution and sent it to the Government:

"The Central Government may be requested to assign the same importance to coconut as given to the seasonal oilseed crop in view of the fact that coconut is one of the most important sources of vegetable oil in the country and, hence, it is of paramount importance to make all-out efforts for its balanced development. The Board resolved to request the Government of India to classify Coconut as an oilseed crop in view of the above position."
(Interruptions)

Government of India has allotted about Rs. 170 crores for the development of oilseeds in the country. If coconut is also declared as an oilseed, I am quite sure that the poor coconut growers in the country, not only of Kerala but the entire country will get more benefit. There is no doubt about it.

Government of Kerala and the poor agriculturists in the country have repeatedly requested the Government of India for completely banning the import of copra and coconut oil. Even though the Government of India has taken a policy decision not to import copra and coconut oil for edible purpose, the import is going on even today in the name of industrial purpose. My submission is that even now coconut and coconut oil are imported into our country for industrial purposes.

SHRI MULLAPALLY RAMACHANDRAN (Cannanore): That is very unfortunate.

SHRI VAKKOM PURUSHOTHAMAN: So, Sir, my submission is that if you really want to save these poor coconut cultivators in the country, you must completely ban the import of copra and coconut oil for any purpose. In this connection, I would like to point out that even sufficient funds are not allocated for the running of the Coconut Development Board. During the Sixth Five Year Plan, for the latter period, that is, for three years, the total allocation was Rs. 7.26 crores. This means an allocation of Rs. 2.42 crores per year. But for the whole of Seventh Five Year Plan, it is only Rs. 9.5 crores, that means an yearly allotment of only Rs. 1.9 crores. Sir, when the expenditure is increasing due to implementation of more and more projects and more and more schemes in the country I cannot understand why the budget provision for this item has been decreased. The Board has also sent its representations to the hon. Minister regarding the powers given to the Coconut Development Board. Sir, it is unfortunate that even those powers given to other Boards like Rubber Board, Tea Board and Coffee Board have not been given to the Coconut Development Board. I cannot understand why those powers are not given to the Coconut Development Board. Is it not a discrimination? Is it because the cultivation of coconut is done by poor man in the country? I think that all these things show that there is step-motherly attitude towards these coconut cultivators. I don't want to name the persons. So, Sir, my request is kindly to help these poor cultivators. It is a small amendment and I do not want to state other things and other difficulties faced by the coconut cultivators. Of course, in our State, most of the trees were affected by disease. I do not want to take the time of the House by going into details. So, my submission is that the hon. Minister may kindly look into these problems and take immediate steps to redress the grievances of the coconut cultivators. Once again I support this Amendment.

SHRI MULLAPPALLY RAMACHANDRAN: Sir, since it is a small Amendment Bill, we can straightaway pass it.

DR. G.S. DHILLON: It is a small amendment Bill for substituting the words 'the Horticulture Commissioner' in place of the words 'the Agriculture Commissioner'. It is not an overall discussion for the whole of the Bill which is already there. But I will not mind if you have discussions on it. My only submission is that this Bill is pending since long. At 5.30 P.M. the Prime Minister is to make a statement. Therefore, I do not think that this can be further delayed. But till that time, if you want to speak on the Bill, you may do so.

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Mr. N. Dennis, you may be brief in your submissions.

SHRI N. DENNIS (Nagercoil): Mr. Deputy-Speaker, Sir, while supporting the Bill, I wish to make a few points. As the hon. Minister has stated, the Bill is a very simple one with a small amendment. It needs no explanation nor is there any ambiguity in the Bill. As the hon. Minister has stated, it is to incorporate the words 'the Horticulture Commissioner' in place of the words 'the Agriculture Commissioner'. The inclusion of these words in the Act is necessitated because the Horticulture Division has been created and Coconut is dealt with by the Horticulture Commissioner. It is a simple amendment.

17.00 hrs.

The point I wish to bring to the kind notice of the hon. Minister is this. As the earlier speaker has stated, I wish to reiterate the point regarding the functioning of the Coconut Board. The functioning of the Coconut Board is not at all satisfactory. The Coconut Board has to be reconstituted with suitable amendments to make it more purposeful and effective. Now the demands of the growers are not satisfactorily met. India is perhaps the third largest coconut producing country in the world. Moreover, coconut is a very useful tree. Each and every part of it is useful. Many people depend on it for their livelihood. As

you know, coconut oil is made in two ways—one is through the mill and the other is by the traditional way as a rural industry providing employment opportunities to several people. Coir is made from coconut husk. It is an important traditional industry in Kerala and some other parts of the country. Toddy is also prepared from coconut. The leaves of the coconut are made use of for thatching houses and for other purposes. The tender coconut is also a very useful drink. It is a very delicious drink and it has medicinal value. So, coconut cultivation has to be improved. But as the earlier speaker has stated, the allotment of the amount to the Coconut Board is not adequate. It is very low. It seems that in the Seventh Five Year Plan the allotment is only about Rs. 9 crores. It is not able to help the growers and producers. The Coconut Board has to help the growers to improve production by planting seedlings, by providing manures and also to find ways to secure proper markets. Moreover, since the constitution of the Coconut Board in 1979 we find that the extent of cultivation has not increased, and also the quantum of production too has not been improved. The area of cultivation in certain places has been reduced. I would point out that in some places the trees have been affected by the root-wilt disease, in some places they suffer from leaf disease, in some other places they suffer from stem disease and in many places they perish due to drought conditions. In some places coconut growers shift the coconut cultivation to other crops because coconut is comparatively less profitable to them.

Another problem is regarding marketing. I wish to point out that the production of coconut is not continuously uniform throughout the year. For six months the production is good. In the rest of the six months the production is low. When the production is good, the price is low, but when the production is good, the price is naturally high. At this time the coconut oil is imported from other countries and it affects the growers. So, the Government has to import coconut oil very carefully by

[Shri N. Dennis]

taking into consideration the welfare of the coconut growers. The production has not increased due to drought conditions and the Board has not effectively helped growers for the promotion of production. It does not help the small farmers and it fails to supply adequate improved varieties of seedlings and manures to the farmers.

It has also not adequately supplied pesticides to the small farmers and others. I wish to make one or two suggestions in this context. Extensive research work has to be done for eradication of the various diseases attacking the coconut cultivation, namely root wilt disease, leaf-disease, stem-disease and all that. Effective pesticides should be supplied to the agriculturists. Many types of pests are attacking coconut and therefore suitable pesticides and medicines are to be found out. For root wilt disease it is said that there is no alternative than to remove the tree. But some medicine has to be found out for the eradication of root wilt disease. For increasing the production, research has to be conducted in this regard. There are several varieties of coconut yellow variety, green variety etc. Some trees are tall and some are short. Some produce more and some have low yield. So, the production, aspect has to be taken into consideration and research work has to be done in that line for the supply of hybrid coconut seedlings.

Now, they are trying to develop dwarf variety and some hybrid varieties which are there. All these varieties have to be taken in combination and research work has to be done in that way so that the production is made higher. This hybrid variety is to be distributed not through the nurseries not owned by private persons but through the Government nurseries.

The fruits of this research work must reach all the nook and corner of the coun-

try and small farmers and other should benefit from this research.

With these words, I support the Bill.

SHRI G.S. BASAVARAJU (Tumkur)
Sir, I support the Bill and also the view expressed by my colleague, Mr. Vakkom Purushothaman who is in the Coconut Development Board. I am also in the Coconut Development Board. He has stated everything. Unfortunately this time, the Government has not brought proper amendment. Instead of the Agriculture Commission, it would be the Horticulture Commission. It is the only amendment. We wholeheartedly support it. My request to the hon. Minister is to bring a relevant amendment next time incorporating necessary ingredients in the amendment. Otherwise it is not useful for running the Coconut Development Board in the country, as stated by my friend, Mr. Vakkom Purushothaman.

I support this Bill.

PROF. K.V. THOMAS (Ernakulam): Sir, it is a very simple amendment and there is not much to be discussed on the amendment. But I take this opportunity to bring to the attention of the hon. Minister the question whether the Coconut Board should exist or not. If the Government is serious about the functioning of the Board, then, ample financial assistance has to be given.

I still remember the day when this Board was inaugurated at Cochin. It was just like Onam festival in Kerala. Everybody in Cochin thought, a new era is coming to the coconut cultivators. Unfortunately, if we go through the functioning of the Board, it can be clearly seen that the financial assistance given by the Central Government is just enough to give TA/DA to the members of the Board and to give salary to its employees.

So, my humble request is that if the Government is serious about the functioning of the Board whose existence is a must for the financial improvement of the farmers in our State, Government should seriously think about how much finance can be given.

In this connection, I would like to draw your attention to another important matter. There is another Board, the Coir Board. Coir Board is under the Ministry of Industry and Commerce. Both are mutually connected and mutually benefited

My friend Shri Vakkom Purushothaman has very clearly stated about the problems of the farmers. So, I am not going into them. If farmers are to be helped, then the industry connected with coconut products is to be developed.

One is the coir industry. Coir industry was the backbone of the traditional industry in Kerala. It was throughout the coastal belt of Kerala. Now it is a very sad sight—the hon. Minister of Industry, when he himself visited Kerala, himself has seen—how the poor women are toiling day and night in the wetting process of getting the fibre. Nowhere in this country such a dirty work is being done by women.

The hon. Minister must see that the first step taken should be to mechanise this wetting process and getting the fibre. I think some positive action will be taken in that regard.

Coming again back to the Coir Board, some method has to be brought out. Either both the Coir Board and the Coconut Board should merge, or some kind of linkage has to be brought about so that both will work.

Secondly, the basic problem which the farmers in Kerala faced last year—hon Members from Kerala have brought it to the attention of the House—is the poor price for the coconut oil and coconut. What is the reason? The reason is that farmers are not benefited from coconut. It

goes to the big business houses like Tatas. They get the maximum benefit. Today in Kerala I find that per kg of coconut oil, the price is between Rs. 20 and 30. But in Delhi, if you go to market and purchase oil which is branded as Tata oil, the price is between Rs. 50/- and Rs. 60/-. What the Board is going to do?

In Kerala, we are producing the maximum coconuts and they are being converted into copra in Kerala. But from copra, the coconut oil is being extracted not in Kerala but in Bombay. It shows that the farmers are not benefited. The people benefited are the big business houses when the coconut goes abroad.

One aim of the Board was that we will start the maximum number of mills in Kerala to produce the coconut oil. But what happens now? What is the question now? In Kerala, after the copra is produced, only 3% or 4% of it is being converted into coconut oil. The rest of the coconut is being transported from Kerala to Bombay and in Bombay, big business houses are converting copra into oil. So, the benefit goes to the big business houses and not to the farmers.

At least, at this stage, when Government is spending a lot of foreign exchange for importing edible oil, you have to think about how the farmers can be helped as this coconut oil is itself an edible oil.

So, the first step which the Government has to take is to declare coconut as an oilseed. If that can be declared as an oilseed, at least a percentage of what you are spending for import of edible oil can be made use of for the functioning of the Coconut Board which can start some development activities in Kerala, not only in helping the farmers, not only in finding out solution for the root wilt disease but also for helping the industries connected with Coconut. So, my humble request is that both the Coconut Board and the Coir Board have to be linked in some way so that the industries connected with coconut would be helped.

[Translation]

*SHRI V. KRISHNA RAO (Chikbalapur): Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, I wholeheartedly support the Amendment Bill further to amend the Coconut Development Board Act, 1979 moved by our hon. Minister for Agriculture.

This is a simple Bill to replace the Commissioner of Horticulture as a member of the Board in place of Commissioner of Agriculture. In fact some of our colleagues have already touched upon several important points. Therefore, I do not want to go into the details. I want to touch upon only two or three relevant points. When I was the Taluk Board President I visited many villages in my constituency and convinced each family to plant coconut trees. Coconut tree is a very useful tree for farmers. It is like their son. The grower of coconut tree can earn at least Rs. 500/- to Rs. 1000 in a year from each tree. Hence it has become inevitable to increase the area of coconut plantation in our country. Karnataka, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa and some other States have coconut plantation. The area of coconut cultivation in these States has not been increased for several years. I request the hon. Minister to look into the matter and to encourage the expansion of coconut cultivation.

The Board is not helping the grower to the expected level. The amount provided to the Board is not at all sufficient for the improvement of coconut cultivation. The amount is just sufficient for the payment of D.A.T.A. and other allowances of the Board members. Hence more funds should be provided to encourage coconut plantation.

There are some diseases prevailing even today which have affected the coconut plantations in the country. Hence it is essential to appoint experts in each district to root out the diseases like root-wilt disease etc.

Coconut cultivation is like an industry. Coconut oil should be declared as edible oil as suggested by my colleagues. Export of coconut products should be increased and the import of coconut oil must be stopped once for all. This step alone can save the cultivators of coconut trees.

I welcome the Amendment Bill and with these words I conclude my speech.

[English]

THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE (DR. G.S. DHILLON): Sir, I thank the hon. Members for having made valuable suggestions. I am quite happy about one thing i.e. nobody has opposed the inclusion of the Horticulture Commissioner. The real amendment about the Horticulture Commissioner is very much approved by almost all of them. Shri Vakkom Purushothaman has said about the two years delay in this regard. Of course, that is known to members. But as far as the question of the Chairman is concerned, please rest assured that the Chairman will be coming up. In fact, there will not be any further delay.

17.21 hrs.

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

One thing I assure you. Both Kerala and Karnataka start with the letter 'K', and I will not deviate from the letter 'K'.

SHRI VAKKOM PURUSHOTHAMAN: You must appreciate our political difficulties also. I have not mentioned that in my speech.

DR. G.S. DHILLON: You will not appreciate the coconut's difficulties when I face them.

The problem is this. You will not like that one 'K' has the term every time. One 'K'

has already accepted the Chairmanship for two terms...

SHRI VAKKOM PURUSHOTHAMAN: No, Sir. There has been only one Chairman so far. He was sick also. I have not gone into the details. He was a cancer patient and he was not attending the office, he was not attending the meetings.

DR. G.S. DHILLON: I assure you, this time there will be an equitable distribution.

(Interruptions)

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER. No dialogue. Order, please.

SHRI VAKKOM PURUSHOTHAMAN: You must appreciate our political problems also. We will not be able to face the people in Kerala. *(Interruptions)*

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order, please.

DR. G.S. DHILLON: Mr. Purushothaman is a very mature politician. I hope he will not raise such questions in the House itself. He may meet me separately. I realise his difficulties. *(Interruptions)*

So far as allocation of funds is concerned, in the Sixth Plan we allocated them Rs. 440 lakhs. In the Seventh Plan we propose to give them Rs. 900 lakhs, including non-plan funds, which is more than double. A question was raised about more allocation also. I would just like to mention that all oilseed farmers together growing 35 lakh tonnes of oil in 200 lakh hectares get only Rs. 100 crores of assistance from the Centre—please note it—whereas the coconut output is only six per cent of the oil and is getting Rs. 9 crores, that is, 50 per cent more than what the other oilseed growers are getting.

A question was raised about import. I quite realise that. Last time also it was raised here and I gave them some sort of an assurance. But a little bit import we have permitted only as replenishment licence.

Only a marginal, small quantity is imported by the exporters of fatty acids and not for any other purpose.

So far as merger of Coir Board and Coconut Board is concerned, I cannot commit myself. I only wish I could reply to all your points. About the other matters raised about Coit Board, etc., I cannot make any commitment now. If the Coir Board so wish, they can move the Government and we shall consider it then.

MR. SPEAKER: The question is:

"That the Bill further to amend the Coconut Development Board Act, 1979, as passed by Rajya Sabha be taken into consideration."

The motion was adopted.

MR. SPEAKER: Now we take up Clause by Clause consideration. There are no amendments to Clause 2.

The question is:

"That Clause 2 stand part of the Bill."

The motion was adopted.

Clause 2 was added to the Bill

Clause 1, the Enacting Formula and the Title were added to the Bill.

DR. G.S. DHILLON: I beg to move:

"That the Bill be passed."

MR. SPEAKER: The question is:

"That the Bill be passed."

The motion was adopted.