

### Preservation of Forests

\*315. SHRI R. P. GAEKWAD: Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) the existing forest areas in the country and the largest fixed for expansion of forest areas in the Sixth Plan;

(b) whether the States have not succeeded in ensuring effective preservation of forests due to want of sufficient guards, intercommunications system and financial resources; and

(c) whether assistance from international organisations would be taken for forest preservation and expansion programmes?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI YOGENDRA MAKWANA):

(a) The existing forest area in the country is 75.06 million hectares. No targets have been fixed for expansion of forest area in the Sixth Plan. However, the various afforestation programmes under implementation in the Sixth Plan period aim at improving the existing forest and also expanding the area under tree cover, outside the forest.

(b) The State Govts. have been making best efforts to protect their forests despite severe constraints like inadequate forest guards, insufficient inter communication systems and limited financial resources.

(c) Yes, Sir.

SHRI R. P. GAEKWAD: The economically depressed people in forest areas are allowed to carry firewood under the 'head-load' system, where by dry wood collected can be carried away by the Adivasis and the backward classes. This is so on paper; and it is laudable since it helps those people who have for centuries existed on forest produce. However, big contractors are once again exploiting this provision, and a regular commis-

sion is set up and they are eventually converting these headloads into truck-loads. Is this not a fact? If so, would Government not consider amending the existing laws and Penal Codes making, not the poor Adivasis but the major contractors or forest Department officials liable for every stringent punishment?

SHRI MADHAVRAO SCINDIA: These Adivasis and the economically depressed classes in the forest areas who are inhabiting there for centuries can carry any dry wood which has fallen; and collect as much as they can carry on their heads. They are allowed to take them away. The question asked is whether the major contractors are interfering with this, and converting this head-load system into a truck load system. Are you going to take some stringent steps against the contractors under the Indian Penal Code—and not against the poor Adivasis?

MR. SPEAKER: Have I allowed it? Mr. Minister, you reply to Mr. Gaekwad.

SHRI YOGENDRA MAKWANA: I am replying to Mr. Gaekwad.

MR. SPEAKER: Was he interpreting for the other hon. Member? It looks like it.

SHRI YOGENDRA MAKWANA: Mr Gaekwad was not audible.

We have enacted the law, viz. the Indian Forest Act, in which there is a provision to penalize those who destroy the forest; but the Adivasis and the people living in the vicinity of the forests are allowed to carry head-loads of forest wood for their own use.

SHRI R. P. GAEKWAD: Is it not a fact that there exist quite a number of paper sanctuaries which have neither flora nor fauna in them? To get an electric wire stretched across such a sanctuary is difficult.