

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.

because it is recognized as a sanctuary. If this is so, why has Government not taken stringent steps to remove these paper sanctuaries from the list of sanctuaries? Secondly, have the recognized local organization been taken into confidence to safeguard the forests, to prevent the deforestation and to prevent ecological imbalance of this kind?

SHRI YOGENDRA MAKWANA: Government is keen to protect the flora and fauna of this country; and we are not aware of the kind of instances which he narrates.

MR. SPEAKER: Mr. Sontosh Mohan Dev.

SHRI SONTOSH MOHAN DEV.
rose

SHRI KRISHNA CHANDRA HALDER: Sir, you called me before. Anyway, he has now sat down.

DR. SUBRAMANIAM SWAMY: This is how Bengalis treat Assamese.

SHRI KRISHNA CHANDRA HALDER: We are friends and brothers.

The question relates to preservation of forests. Indiscriminate cutting of forest trees is creating an ecological imbalance. You know that indiscriminately giving licence to saw mills is also one of the reasons for cutting of the forests. To preserve forests and for expansion of forests, will Government bring in a Bill to stop giving new licences for saw mills, and for presentation of the forests?

SHRI YOGENDRA MAKWANA: So far as licences are concerned they are regulated by State Governments. But so far as preservation and afforestation are concerned, I have earlier also said that there is a Forest Conservation Act, under which we do it; and the afforestation programme was undertaken by the State Governments also. I would like to

inform the hon. Members that the work done so far in all the States has given good results. The target for afforestation in all the States was 195 crores of seedlings, and the achievement of this programme is 206 crores.

SHRI SONTOSH MOHAN DEV: Preservation of forests, as the hon. Minister has said, can only be done by afforestation; and one of the sensitive points in Assam is the possession of land by plains people in forest areas. For tribal people, it is their land. In view of this may I know what positive steps Government is taking, to protect the forest land and also for afforestation?

SHRI YOGENDRA MAKWANA : As far as protecting the forests is concerned, I have earlier also said that there is an Indian Forests Act for Penalizing those who cut trees indiscriminately without permission; and there is a Forest Conservation Act also. So far as afforestation is concerned, I have already informed the hon. Members that we have achieved the target which was fixed, i.e. 195 crores seedlings. We have achieved 206 crores.

SHRI M. SATYANARAYAN RAO: This deforestation problem is causing a great concern to the whole country. You must have seen the editorial in the *Hindustan Times* today. The whole of south is becoming a desert now. There is drinking water problem in Tamil Nadu. It has become a very difficult problem. This is because of indiscriminate felling of trees and it is also because of corruption. Corruption is responsible for this kind of situation.

I would like to know from the hon. Minister what steps he is going to take to eliminate this corruption and also for afforestation.

MR. SPEAKER: Question hour is over.