

[25 April, 2000]

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proposing to further bring it down to 7-8 per cent. The prices are going up. The rate of interest is going down. They have reduced it in the PPF, in EPIF, and in GPF. They have reduced it in post office savings also. The condition of pensioners and retirees has become wretched. The position of the retirees has become as it had become of retirees in Russia, where many people are begging after the market economy has been introduced. The Government has not paid any attention to that problem. I would like to draw the attention of the Government to take care of the retirees. They have served the Government, they have pulled the wheels of the administration for 33, 34, 40 years. If the State forgets them, if the system forgets them, that is very pathetic. It is an unpardonable offence. So, I would urge upon the Government to be sympathetic to the pensioners and retirees. Thank you, Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Now, it is getting 1 o' clock. Only one small Special Mention is left. I hope we will complete this. Now, Shrimati Geetha Vanga.

Sharp decline in the prices of coconut in Andhra Pradesh

SHRIMATI GEETHA VANGA (Andhra Pradesh): I thank you Mr. Chairman, Sir, for giving me an opportunity to place the issue of sharp decline in the prices of coconut in Andhra Pradesh, on the floor of the House. Sir, coconut is the only means of livelihood to millions of small and marginal farmers in the country. The bond, the relationship between a common man and the coconut plant can be perceived from the role of coconut and its products in his social life.

The crop has been in existence for the last so many years. In India, it is how grown in nearly 1.8 million hectares, yielding 14 billion nuts per year. the crop plays a significant role in poverty alleviation and employment generation, especially in the rural sector. The importance and demand of coconut is increasing day by day. But because of pests and diseases, the growers are facing huge losses every year.

Sir, there has been a steep fall, in the price of coconut recently. This fall in the price of coconut has adversely affected the plight of die coconut growers. It may be highlighted in this context that, raising of a coconut plantation has a long gestation period before the benefit of the crop is reaped by the growers. As a result of this, a major portion of the life of a farmer is devoted to raising the crop and, at the end of it, if the prices are not

remunerative, the farmers hopes are shattered. We have already witnessed earlier the extreme hardships which have been faced by the farmers due to non-realisation of remunerative prices in other crops also. Therefore, it is imperative for the Government to bring out a market intervention strategy by ensuring a minimum support price for coconut so that the farmers do not resort to any drastic steps.

Sir, I request the Minister of Agriculture to kindly intervene in the matter, either directly or through a Coconut Board, to mitigate the hardship faced by the farmers. Thank you, Sir.

MR. CHAIRMAN: The House is adjourned for one hour.

The House then adjourned for lunch at three minutes past one of the clock.

The House reassembled after lunch at thirteen minutes past two of the clock,
The Vice-Chairman (Shri T.N. Chaturvedi) in the Chair.

MOTION OF THANKS ON THE PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS -Contd.

THE VICE-CHAIRMAN (SHRI T.N. CHATURVEDI): Shri Kartar Singh Duggal.

SHRI KARTAR SINGH DUGGAL: Sir, listening to the marathan debate on the Motion of Thanks on the President's Address, I thought there was hardly anything left for me to comment upon, excepting perhaps, Kargil. I, therefore, propose to confine myself only to Pakistan's defeat in Kargil referred to in the Address in the context of the long-drawn hostility with our neighbour. Pakistan; more because I happen to be a little acquainted with the terrain and the disposition of our security forces in the region.

Courtesy Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, as members of the High-powered Media Advisory Committee, Dr. Mulk Raj Anand and I were guests of the Border Security Focre in Jammu and Kashmir in the Leh Sector, to acquaint ourselves, with the conditions in the forward areas with a view to determining how best the electronic media could play its part. All through the recent Kargil conflict, I was reminded of our visit, particularly to the Kargil Camp and what we were shown around.