

RAJYA SABHA

Friday, the 10th December, 2004/19 Agrahayana, 1926 (Saka)

The House met at eleven of the clock

MR. CHAIRMAN in the Chair.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Illegal felling of sandalwood trees in Kerala

*141. SHRI B.K. HARIPRASAD: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that illegal felling of sandalwood trees in Marayoor highrange in Kerala has been rampant, leading to illicit sandalwood oil distillation in Pallakkad district in Kerala;

(b) whether the forest officials of Pallakkad district recently raided a few distillation units using illegal stocks of sandalwood; and

(c) whether any investigation is being conducted on reported theft of sandalwood from Marayoor highrange for clandestine use by distillation units in Pallakkad?

THE MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI A. RAJA):
(a) to (c) A Statement is laid on the Table of the House.

Statement

(a) Yes, Sir. The Government is aware of the illegal felling of sandalwood trees in Marayoor Range. There have been a number of cases of illicit sandalwood distillation units function in Pallakkad using the illicitly felled material from Marayoor.

(b) Yes, Sir. Recently a raid has been conducted on few factories on 10.10.2004.

(c) Yes, Sir.

SHRI B.K. HARIPRASAD: Mr. Chairman, Sir, the hon. Minister admitted that he is aware of the illicit distillation of sandalwood oil, felling sandalwood trees and illegal stocking of sandalwood in the State of

Kerala. There is a clear-cut policy that growing and felling of sandalwood trees are banned in some of the southern States, especially Karnataka, and in border areas of Kerala. If the Government is aware that there is illegal felling of these trees, I would like to know the action that has been contemplated by the Government to curb smuggling of sandalwood.

SHRI A. RAJA: Sir, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh are the States known for sandalwood cultivation and sandalwood growth. These States have their own stringent laws. Unfortunately, the Kerala Government did not have such legislation so far. Of course, they promulgated an Ordinance which is pending before the President of India. As soon as this Ordinance is legislated or given effect to, stringent action can be taken to curb this activity.

SHRI B.K. HARIPRASAD: My second supplementary is that recently there was a raid in Kerala in Pallakkad and some other districts where huge quantity of sandalwood was seized.

MR. CHAIRMAN: He has agreed to it.

SHRI B.K. HARIPRASAD: Sir, he has accepted it. I just wanted to know whether the teams that were investigating this illegal felling of sandalwood trees are still investigating it or they have been transferred from the places where they were investigating.

SHRI A. RAJA: Of course, frequent raids are being conducted by the State Government. The last such raid was conducted by the State Government on 10.10.2004. Of course, in that raid, no person was arrested. But, so far, up to 13.9.2004, 2005 persons have been arrested and offences have been registered.

SHRI A. VIJAYARAGHAVAN: Sir, this is a matter of grave concern. In Kerala, we do not have that much of sandalwood. The only sandalwood factories that are there, are on the Kerala-Tamil Nadu border. So, whenever a raid is conducted, nobody is found there. That means, there is a nexus between the politicians and the sandalwood distilleries of that areas. Naturally, the State Government does not have stringent rules to curb this menace. And we are all aware that in this particular area almost all the sandalwood trees have been cut down. So, naturally, you have to intervene. Would you take stern action? Would you write to the State Government of Kerala to take stern action against this activity? I would like to know this from the hon. Minister.

SHRI A. RAJA: Sir, only last week, I wrote to the Chief Minister to have the Ordinance as early as possible. I feel, once the Ordinance is given effect, since the Tamil Nadu Government have stringent law, the officers who are involved in such raids in Tamil Nadu, can chase the offenders and.....

SHRI A. VIJAYARAGHAVAN: This is the border.

SHRI A. RAJA: Yes. They can chase up to their territorial limits in Tamil Nadu and, after that, by virtue of the law, they cannot catch hold of these persons. So, the lacuna is in the Kerala Government's handling of it. The Kerala Government has already been duly instructed and I have written personally to the hon. Chief Minister of Kerala in this regard.

SHRI A. VIJAYARAGHAVAN: Would you give instructions for the closure of these factories?

SHRI A. RAJA: That is not within my purview. That is within the purview of the Department of Industries of Kerala.

SHRI R. SHUNMUGASUNDARAM: Sir, I want to ask the hon. Minister, through you, whether, after the killing of the forest brigand Veerappan, there is any increase in sandalwood felling, because it is also reported that because of Veerappan the other poachers were afraid of entering the forests. I want clarification from the Minister.

SHRI A. RAJA: No specific study has been conducted in this regard.

*142. [The questioner (SHRI ABU ASIM AZMI) was absent. For answer vide page 30]

Failure of PDS

*143. SHRI TARIQ ANWAR:†

SHRI N.K. PREMACHANDRAN:

Will the Minister of CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Public Distribution System has failed to meet the expectation of the masses;

†The Question was actually asked on the floor of the House by Shri Tariq Anwar.