

Recently, our Indian Ambassador in Greece, Shri Ratan Singh Bedi has informed the Ministry of External Affairs about cases that have been launched by Italy and Greece in respect of the Malta boat tragedy. In this tragedy, 170 Indians were also murdered. Applications were sent to the Government of India by the Malta Boat Tragedy Probe Mission, an NGO from Punjab, giving concrete evidence of whatever they could gather by their enquiries, conducted at their expenses in Malta, Italy, Greece, France, Germany, Switzerland, etc. Unfortunately, insurance claims or charges of murder have not yet been initiated by the Government of India. The tragedy occurred on 20<sup>th</sup> December, 1996; and evidently there has been a gross neglect by the Government of India since 1996 onwards. Thank you

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Eduardo Faleiro, you will only associate. No speech. No speech.

SHRI EDUARDO FALEIRO (Goa): Mr. Chairman, Sir, I fully associate myself very strongly with the Special Mention made by the hon. Member. I would also like to say a couple of words.

MR. CHAIRMAN: No. Now, next is Mr. Vijaya Raghavan.

#### **Hardships of Coconut farmers because of the sharp fall in price**

SHRI A. VIJAYA RAGHAVAN (Kerala): Mr. Chairman, Sir, this is an issue related to the coconut farmers. Millions of coconut farmers are suffering hardships because of the unprecedented fall in the prices of coconut, copra and coconut oil. Coconut farming is the backbone of Kerala's economy. Similarly, coconut cultivation is the main source of income to a large number of farmers in the Southern States like Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. The price of copra and coconut oil has come down in the month of July, 2000 to the lowest ever price in the last five years. The price of coconut oil also has come down from Rs.5,125 in July, 1999 to Rs.2,975 in July, 2000. Even though this is the lean season, the production is also reportedly to be less because of the coconut price. The fall in the price has come as a surprise to the farmers.

NAFED which is the Government's agency that procures copra at a price of Rs.3,250 per quintal has also withdrawn its presence from the market on an excuse of lack of storage facilities. This action has also adversely affected the market.

This sharp fall of coconut price is the result of the Exim policy of the Central Government. Even after repeated requests from the State Government for more assistance to the farmers, no positive step has been taken by the Central Government so far. It is unfortunate to note that when the farmers are facing loss of production because of the coconut price, the Central Government has failed to assist them.

Therefore, I urge upon the Central Government to take urgent steps to assist the coconut farmers by stopping all kinds of import of coconut products and palmolein. Similarly, I also request the Central Government to issue instructions to the NAFED to restart coconut procurement; and also to provide sufficient funds to the agency to procure copra and allied products. Thank you.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Javare Gowda, you associate.

SHRI H.K. JAVARE GOWDA (Karnataka): Mr. Chairman, Sir, I associate myself with the Special Mention made by the hon. Member.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Now, Mr. Margabandu. You also associate. No reading.

SHRI R. MARGABANDU: Mr. Chairman, Sir, the whole of Tamil Nadu...

MR. CHAIRMAN: No reading. You have to only say, "I associate myself". This is the new rule. ...*(Interruptions)*... You associate. That is all right. ...*(Interruptions)*... No reading. No speech please.

SHRI R. MARGABANDU: I also associate myself with the Special Mention made by the hon. Member.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Ramachandra Reddy.

SHRI SOLIPETA RAMACHANDRA REDDY (Andhra Pradesh): Mr. Chairman, Sir, thank you. I associate myself with the Special Mention of Mr. Vijaya Raghavan on hardships faced by the coconut farmers because of the sharp fall in the price of coconut in Kerala and in Andhra Pradesh too.