

district. The watershed programmes that have been undertaken are showing encouraging results in improving agricultural productivity, reducing migration of farmers, increasing fodder supply, milk productivity, and also helping in increasing the green cover, especially with the help of farmers and community participation.

Hence, I request, through you, Madam, the hon. Minister of Rural Development to immediately sanction 200 new watersheds under Desert Development Programme to Anantapur District, which will help the district to develop.

SHRI RAVULA CHANDRA SEKAR REDDY (Andhra Pradesh):
Madam, I associate myself with this Special Mention.

SHRI RUMANDLA RAAMACHANDRAYYA (Andhra Pradesh):
Madam, I also associate myself with it.

Need for Anti-Conversion Law

SHRI P.G. NARAYANAN (Tamil Nadu): Madam, nowadays, in the era of social justice, forcible religious conversion has become a menace, and, till now, there is no law to punish people who are converting others into their religion, using force, allurements or by fraudulent means. The practice of large-scale conversion has become a routine affair, which endangers the social fabric of the society.

The anti-conversion law must act as a deterrent against anti-social elements, which are exploiting the innocent people belonging to the depressed classes. To stop communal tensions and violence, under the garb of conversions, anti-conversion laws is the need of the hour. These religious conversions pose a grave threat to national security and integrity.

Taking everything into consideration, the hon. Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, Dr. Puratchi Thalaivi, has taken the lead by enacting the legislation, banning forcible religious conversions in the State.

Madam, I strongly urge upon the Government of India and all State Governments to legislate a similar anti-conversion law to protect the social

fabric of our country and render justice to the innocent people belonging to the depressed classes.

SHRI S.S. CHANDRAN (Tamil Nadu): Madam, I associate with him.

DR. V. MAITREYAN (Tamil Nadu): Madam, I also associate with him.

SHRIMATI S.G. INDIRA (Tamil Nadu): Madam, I too associate with him.

Evacuation of people from forest

SHRI JANARDHANA POOJARY (Karnataka): Madam, crores of people, mostly belonging to the socially and economically weaker sections of the society, have been living in the reserved forest areas in various parts of the country for centuries, tilling the soil and in employment, generated through the forest produce, and in peace and harmony with Nature. For example, a number of families in the 'Malnad' region, spread over a few districts of Karnataka, namely, Kodagu, Dakshina Kannada, Uttara Kannada, Chickmagalore, Hassan and Shimoga, have been tilling forest land for generations. A total of 14,848.83 hectares of land is under cultivation.

However, the occupation of forest land by these families is treated as an encroachment and a threat to the eco-system. Therefore, on the ground of protecting the flora and fauna, they are being uprooted from their hearth. In the process, they are deprived of their land and the source of livelihood. The order of the hon. Supreme Court of India, for clearing the forest land of such encroachments, has given an impetus to the evacuation exercise. Having been deprived of their livelihood, the affected farmers have no option but to commit suicide, as in the case of farmers in a number of States, hit by natural calamities. Laws are made for protecting the interests of the people and not to jeopardise their safety and livelihood. Since it is a human problem, the relevant laws may be suitably amended to protect their interests.

The Central Government may, therefore, immediately frame a suitable legislation, in consultation with the State Government, to protect their interests.