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Title: Need to protect the traditional cattle grazing right in Western Ghats hampered by newly identified wildlife sanctuary.

* SHRI P. LINGAM (TENKASI): Madam Chairperson, I thank you for giving me this opportunity to raise an urgent matter of public importance while drawing the notice of the Government, through this august House, about the plight of tribal people in the remote villages of my constituency and also of the poor agricultural labourers who are losing their livelihood because of their being denied their traditional rights to graze the cattle in the foothills of Western Ghats in my Tenkasi constituency.

In our country, traditional cattle grazing rights have provided livelihood to the rural poor while contributing to the expansion of biodiversity. This also gives rise to increasing soil fertility due to the natural manure provided by the cattle to the land in return for the grazing facility it gets. All these years, traditional cattle grazing rights were available to the poor people living in the foothills of Western Ghats to take their cattle up to a height of 300 metres. They not only graze on the grass but also provide natural manure to the forest vegetation. In our country, food production is reducing because of our ignoring the needs of poor farmers especially in the foothill areas of mountain ranges. Just because wildlife sanctuaries are announced without taking into consideration the plight of agricultural labour and landless farmers in the remote villages, they are put to great hardship. They have to bear the brunt of forest officials too apart from their crop loss caused by wild boars and other wild animals that get a free run because of those lands becoming inaccessible to farmers.

* English translation of the speech originally delivered in Tamil.

In my constituency, particularly in Virudhunagar District forest land areas, in order to protect 400 grey squirrels, that area has been declared as a sanctuary. Similarly, in Tirunelveli District, taking the name of tigers, forest land has been made inaccessible to the traditional cattle grazers. This has resulted in non-availability of grass and fodder to the cattle causing depletion in cattle population which affects agriculture and agriculturists. Farmers are prevented from staying in their fields during the night and are not able to safeguard their agricultural produce from being destroyed by wild animals because of the free run they get in the wake of that area being declared as wildlife sanctuary. In fact, cattle do not pose a threat to both forests and the wild animals. Hence, I urge upon the Union Government to have a re-look at the recent announcements and restore the traditional rights of the people living there in the foothills of Western Ghats to carry on with their traditional cattle grazing occupation which will contribute to agricultural production while allowing their livelihood to go on.