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Title: Need to provide better health care facilities and implement the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 in an effective manner to address the problem of tribals in Attappadi area of Palakkad district, Kerala.

SHRI P.K. BIJU (ALATHUR): Since the past 16 months, 52 infant deaths have been reported from Attappadi, Palakkad, Kerala. Malnutrition and low blood count are found to be the reasons for the deaths. Malnutrition and anemia are prevalent among the tribals in Attappadi. The Central and state government had announced a slew of relief measures. But none of them has materialised.

There is no dearth of health care facilities in Attappadi. But none of them were working effectively and efficiently for the past two years. Despite an increase in the mortality rate of tribal infants, the Integrated Tribal Development Project (ITDP) spent just Rs.35 lakh on the health sector out of its total expenditure of Rs. 12.55 crore during 2012-13. The present Government of Kerala also started leasing out the PHCs in the tribal areas, citing non-profitability, to the private parties. It is also one of the reasons for the spate of infant deaths in tribal areas. There are 172 anganwadis here but they are almost non-functional. The alleged apathy of officials resulted in transferring of distribution of nutrition supplements under ICDS to the private parties and they sell it in the black market.

The present crisis in Attappadi occurred not because of any immediate reasons. The infant deaths are the combined effect of marginalisation and impoverishment of adivasi communities. But the root cause of malnutrition and poor health status of the tribes in Attappadi is land alienation. The Forest Rights Act, 2006, has not been properly implemented in Attappadi. Now most tribes are living on barren hill slopes. Taking advantage of their poor economic condition, Adivasis are lured to illegal drug trafficking and liquor trade by the mafia operating from outside.

I urge the Government to take urgent steps to conduct an enquiry into the deaths of children in Attappadi. Also, steps should be taken to provide better health facilities and nutritious food in the tribal area and for this purpose more budgetary provisions should be allotted.