

(iii) CRISIS IN FISHING INDUSTRY IN KERALA

SHRI XAVIER ARAKAL (Ernakulam): In Kerala, the fishing industry has been garve difficulties for the past three years and is now entering into a serious crisis. As is wellknown, the foreign exchange earnings of the Indian exchequer from fish export is to the tune of over Rs. 300 crores per year of which Kerala's contribution is about 40 per cent. In Kerala, the people engaged in fishing and its allied industries outnumber those employed in the agricultural sector. This highlights the vital role of fishing industry to the economy of Kerala and its vast employment potential. Any crisis in this industry is bound to have serious repercussions affecting several lakhs of people who depend on this industry for their livelihood, this is apart from the damaging effect on the foreign exchange earnings of the country. There are many reasons for the present crisis.

The foreign market is now shy and the demand for Indian fish products are not so high as it was in the past. We have been for the past 20 years exploiting the sea wealth by utilising crafts of smaller size only. Besides, the operations have been concentrated in the same zone without even venturing into deeper areas. Due to continuous operation at the same area, the shrimps and other exportable items were driven into the deep seas and destroyed or killed before maturity. Unless deep sea fishing on a wide scale is made possible, there is no hope of getting any appreciable quantities of fish catch from the sea wealth. Apart from that, the cost of operations also has gone up three times within the last three years, mainly due to the increase in the price of diesel, spare parts, labour charges etc. Besides, due to the high consumption of diesel, no boat owner dare to attempt a venture into distant areas where better catch may be possible. No one wants to take any risk in view of the prohibitive fuel and other costs,

Therefore, to correct this crisis of the industry, the following measures are urgently proposed: :

1. A subsidy of 50 per cent in the cost of diesel by given to the deep sea fishing trawlers.

2. Most boat owners who have borrowed from Nationalised banks and other financing institutions are unable to repay the instalments or the interest due to heavy losses on operation. I suggest interest on these loans be waived for the years 1977-88, 1978-79 and 1979-80. Such waiver has been done in the case of agricultural loans.

3. Because of the acute difficulties facing the industry, a moratorium be put on repayment of borrowings for the next three years to enable the industry to recover from the present crisis and allow the sick units to revive.

4. Loans to fishing industry be treated at par with agricultural loans and the rate chargeable be restricted to 4½ per cent as in the case of agricultural re-financing from the Reserve Bank of India. The levy of 4½ per cent interest should have effect after the expiry of 3 years' moratorium. This should be extended to the cooperative societies with greater vigour and speed.

Besides its capacity for foreign exchange earnings and large employment potential of the poor classes of the society, the industry deserves to be treated on par with agriculture for all concessions from banks and Government. Unless these measures are adopted immediately, the fishing industry as a whole and particularly, in Kerala, can not face the challenge and I urge upon the Government to take speedy steps to coordinate between different departments and boost this priority industry.