

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Minister is saying that specific cases, if any, may be brought to his notice.

[English]

SHRI BALGOPAL MISHRA: One specific case has been brought to your notice.

SHRI CHIMANBHAI MEHTA: The hon. Member is saying that one specific case has been brought to notice. I will go into the record and definitely look into that matter. That will also be taken into consideration.

Forest Cover

*144. DR. VENKATESH KABDE: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) the extent of geographical area covered by forest or vegetation in the country;

(b) whether it has declined or increased in the last five years;

(c) if the area has declined the causes of decline in vegetation cover during the last five years in the country; and

(d) the steps taken to restore the proper land and forest ratio in India?

THE MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI NILAMANI ROURAY): (a) to (d). A statement is laid on the Table of the House.

STATEMENT

FOREST COVER IN INDIA

(a) According to the studies conducted by Forest Survey of India using Lands at Imagery, the extent of forest cover in the country during the period 1985-87 was 64.01 million hectares.

(b) The forest cover has declined from 64.20 million hectares in 1981-83 to 64.01 million hectares in 1985-87. However, the area under dense forest cover with a crown density of over 40% has increased from 36.14 million hectares to 37.84 million hectares.

(c) The causes of decline of forest cover are:—

(1) Higher demand for fuelwood and timber due to increased population.

(2) Overgrazing leading to degradation of forest land.

(3) Requirement of wood based industries.

(4) Insufficient financial outlays for regeneration of degraded forest land.

(5) The problem of shifting cultivation in tribal areas especially the North-Eastern Region.

(d) Steps to restore proper land and forest ratio in India involve forest protection measures and massive afforestation. These include:—

(1) The National Forest Policy, 1988, lays more emphasis on conservation of forests. There are specific provisions for protection of forests from grazing, fires and encroachment.

(2) Forest (Conservation) Act, was amended in 1988 to make it more stringent.

(3) A Centrally sponsored scheme is under implementation to help the States for development of infrastructure for protection of forests.

(4) Alternative sources of energy are

- being developed to replace fuel-wood in domestic and commercial sectors.
- (5) Wood is substituted by alternative materials in packaging, railway sleepers, building construction, furniture etc.
- (6) Import Policy for timber has been liberalised.
- (7) Fiscal incentives are given to industries using wood substitute raw materials such as agrowaste etc.
- (8) Efforts are being made to control shifting cultivation.
- (9) Guidelines have been issued to State/UT Governments from time to time for protection of forests. Some of these guidelines are as follows:—
- (i) To avoid felling of natural forests and where such felling are inevitable for restoration of crop or other silvicultural considerations, it should be restricted to area not exceeding 10 hectares in the hills and 25 hectares in the plains.
 - (ii) To ban felling in the hills above, 1,000 metres, at least for some years.
 - (iii) To identify critical areas in the hills and mountains which require protection from felling of forests and need immediate vigorous afforestation.
 - (iv) To set apart 4% of the geographical area as protection area like wildlife sanctuaries, national parks, biosphere reserves etc.
 - (v) Special guidelines have been
- issued for regulation of saw mills.
- (10) Steps taken for afforestation include:—
- (i) Restructuring of Wasteland development Programme.
 - (ii) Involvement of village communities for reafforestation of degraded forest land on usufruct sharing basis.
 - (iii) Encouragement to private farmers/voluntary agencies in afforestative programme.
 - (iv) Programme of reafforestation of degraded forestland in the Eighth Five Year Plan

DR. VENKATESH KABDE: Mr. Speaker, Sir, you will agree with me that the decrease of the forest cover is a very serious national problem. Experts have opined that if the forest cover comes to below 11 per cent of the total geographical area, a civilisation may completely be wiped out. We have made all-out efforts. We enacted the Forest Conservation Act, 1980 and we again tried to make it more stringent in 1988. There is the National Forest Policy of 1988. All these efforts have been made. But I wonder what has been the result of these efforts. If we look at the figures which are given by the satellite imagery and by the Forest Survey of India, we find that between 1981 and 1986 there has been a net decline of the forest cover of 47675 hectares per year. These are the Government figures which I am quoting. One finds that whatever significant gains have been made, they have been made only in two State areas i.e. in Punjab and then in Sikkim. As far as Union Territories are concerned, it is a very small area with positives gain. But there has been a net decline in the forest cover, particularly in some States. For example, in the State of Gujarat, the decline of forest cover is 14 per cent; in Haryana, it is 12 per cent...

MR. SPEAKER: Please put your question.

DR. VENKATESH KABDE: I am coming to the question. These are the States which have done poorly in spite of the efforts that have been made. I want to know the reasons in this regard. In spite of all these efforts why have these particular States done poorly? What are the efforts of the Government in making these States increase the forest cover? As far as these States are convergent, the forest cover has decreased in spite of the best efforts. Now, what steps are going to be taken by the Government to see that the forest cover increases there. This is my first question.

SHRI NILAMANI ROUFRAY: Sir, it is a fact that the forest cover has decreased. According to the standards laid down by the Forest Policy of our country, the forest cover should be one-third of the geographical area of our country. If we take that into consideration, it is far less because our geographical area is 329 million hectares. If we take this into consideration and the standards prescribed by the Forest Policy, it would come to about 110 million hectares. As against that, our recorded forest area now is 75 million hectares. The actual forest cover, as surveyed by the Satellite imagery, is 64.20 million hectares. Therefore, there has been a decline in so far as the forest cover is concerned. After the enactment of the Forest Conservation Act of 1980, the situation has considerably improved. As against the period beginning from 1951 to 1980 the total loss of forest due to diversification is about four million and thirty three thousand hectares. After this, it has come down, as stated by the hon. Member. Annually, it has now come down to 44,000 hectares. Therefore, the improvement is quite visible if you compare it with earlier period. Now, efforts are being made in various sectors to see how to improve this degradation of the forests. So far as Wasteland Development Board is concerned, it has taken up the work of afforestation in wide areas through various State Government agencies and also with the help of foreign aids, they are trying their best to

recoup this. So, this is the position.

DR. VENKATESH KABDE: Regarding my question, "why certain States are not doing well", that has not been answered. However, I will proceed with the second question. In spite of all the efforts, why is our forest cover not increasing? One may bring in the factor of population explosion. Our hon. Minister might say that this does not refer to his Ministry. But this is the most important factor. Our population has increased and, therefore, our need for fire wood has increased and the wood required for housing has increased. Therefore, there is a greater premium on forest. This is a very serious situation. We are trying to make alternative sources of energy available to the people; we are trying to make available the substitution for wood and also the import of timber. But what I would like to know from the Minister is, what is the effect of all this? These are very good measures. But they seem to be in a very small measure. For example, substitution of wood and all these efforts are made only in the cities. I think, may be some subsidy needs to be given. Therefore, what effort the Government is making for that? Are we providing alternatives in the form of solar energy or substitution of wood. What efforts have been made and what are the results achieved?

SHRI NILAMANI ROUFRAY: Sir, I agree with the hon. Member that it is a fact that increase in population is telling much upon the protection of the forest. We are trying our best to provide alternative source of energy so that fire wood that is being brought stealthily from the forest can be stopped and for that also we are encouraging solar energy. The Energy Department are also giving subsidy so far as this solar *Chulha* is concerned. Therefore, this is a fact that increase in population is greatly affecting the conservation of forest.

SHRI Y.S. RAJASEKHAR REDDY: Mr. Speaker, Sir, is the Government aware that the naxalite in Andhra Pradesh are felling lakhs of acres of forest and are selling away the wood and distributing the land thus

denuded. That way, they are making lot of money for themselves and forest is getting denuded and they are also getting the sympathy of the villagers who are landless and are getting some land for themselves. Government of Andhra is trying to prevent it unfortunately not able to do much about it. Will the Central Government come in a big way to arrest this? Will the Central Government put up a Task Force concerning the forest department to see that this process is arrested. Secondly, all of us are aware, in Bombay High and all the gas producing stations, lots and lots of gas is being burnt away because it is not getting bottles. Will the Government take special efforts to see that the bottling of gas is done in a very big way so that gas is supplied at cheaper cost to the consumers?

MR. SPEAKER: You can reply to the first question.

SHRI NILAMANI ROUSTRAY: So far as information given by the hon. Member about naxalites exploiting the forest in Andhra, I have no definite information with me. (*Interruptions*)

SHRI Y.S. RAJASEKHAR REDDY: You do not have information!

MR. SPEAKER: Let us hear the Minister.

(*Interruptions*)

SHRI NILAMANI ROUSTRAY: About the other question of the Hon. Member that if the Andhra Pradesh Government makes an effort whether the Central Government will help them, we will certainly look into the matter. If such a request comes from the Government of Andhra Pradesh, we will do what is necessary. (*Interruptions*)

DR. THAMBI DURAI: We are always speaking about deforestation in our country, because we are losing a lot of trees in the forests. As Shri Rajasekhar Reddy said, some elements are making deforestation and are getting some kind of sympathy also.

In the same way in other States also it is happening. I am not talking about naxalities, but some other anti-social elements are making a lot of deforestation. You might have read in the newspapers about one person called Veerappan. He is operating in different States of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala by changing his place. The problem is, our forest officers are not able to tackle him because he is having modern weapons which our police do not have.

I would like to know whether the Central Government will interfere in this and give facilities to the State Government and officials to control all these anti-social elements and to see that our forests will be kept intact.

SHRI NILAMANI ROUSTRAY: These are the matters which come under the jurisdiction of the State Government.

DR. THAMBI DURAI: I am not telling law and order; I am talking about deforestation. (*Interruptions*)

SHRI NILAMANI ROUSTRAY: In the forest area if something like this happens, if some people bring weapons and kill guards, in that case the State Government should come to the rescue of those people and utilise the State machinery for this purpose.

[*Translation*]

SHRI MAHESHWAR SINGH: Through you, I would like to know from the Minister of Environment and Forests whether he is aware of the fact that Himachal Pradesh is called the State of fruits with its 34 thousand apple growers. They depend on wooden boxes for despatch of their produce to the markets. But if this process of sending the entire produce of fruits in the wooden boxes is continued it will cause of an area of about 666 hectares every year. The State Government is trying their best to see that instead of wooden boxes, cartons are used to send the entire fruit produce, but the cartons are so costly that it is impossible for the growers to purchase them. I would like to give an example that a packing carton of 20 kilos costs

Rs. 33. I would like to know from the hon. Minister whether in order to protect forest cover he proposes to take steps to ensure that the Government provides subsidy on the packing material other than the wooden cases and get the excise duty on this material waived off so that farmers can get packing cases at a concessional rate and the Himalayan forest cover is also duly protected.

[*English*]

SHRI NILAMANI ROUSTRAY: I agree with the hon. Member; this is a problem with Himachal Pradesh. Lots of fruit packets require wood and they are telling upon the forests. It has become a problem to the forest Department of the Himachal Government. They are making some other alternative arrangements like hard plastic cases etc. Whatever proposal or request comes from the Himachal Pradesh Government, we will certainly try to help them.

SHRI BASUDEB ACHARIA: The forest problem is enormous and this is related with the economy of our country. The State Government of West Bengal three years back submitted a proposal to the Central Government for the development of Ayodhya Hill in the District Purulia integrating all the programmes like IRDP and other rural development programmes. Poor people are felling the trees or cutting the trees because of their poor economic conditions. If some of the integrated programmes are adopted and taken, then the forest can be saved, the denudation of forest can be stopped. May I know from the hon. Minister whether the proposal which was submitted three years back—the estimate was about three crores of rupees—to save the forest of Ayodhya Hills, will be taken into account and whether the Government proposes to assist in stopping the denudation of forest of Ayodhya Hills of Purulia District in West Bengal?

SHRINILAMANI ROUSTRAY: Sir, I have no definite knowledge about the proposal which the hon. Member is mentioning. I will

certainly look into, if there is any such proposal; I will discuss and inform the hon. Member of what action has been taken and what action we are going to take. At the moment, I have no specific knowledge about this.

SHRI BASUDEB ACHARIA: I will send you a copy of that proposal. (*Interruptions*)

SHRI D. AMAT: Mr. Speaker, Sir, in view of the criminal felling and denudation of forest in some parts of Orissa, would the Government think in term so equipping the Forest Department with the power to 'shoot-at-sight' the offenders and also give them powers to seize and arrest the poachers?

SHRI NILAMANI ROUSTRAY: Sir, this is a proposal, which we cannot agree. (*Interruptions*) We will instruct the State Government (*Interruptions*)

[*Translation*]

Education Policy

*145. SHRI RAJENDRA AGNIHOTRI. Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are contemplating to abolish the existing dual education policy in the country with a view to bring about uniformity in education throughout;

(b) if so, whether Government are formulating any action plan for making education employment-oriented; and

(c) if so, by what time the draft in this regard is likely to be prepared?

[*English*]

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT (SHRI CHIMANBHAI MEHTA): (a) to (c). A statement is laid on the table of the House.