

30-08-2005 Further discussion on Resolution regarding approval of recommendations in the second report of Railway Convention Committee and Railways (Amendment) Bill moved by Shri R. Velu on the 29th August, 2005

Sir, this Bill is a small Bill. It wants to set up a Railway Land Development Authority, to develop railway lands.

This proposal was made during the Ninth Plan period by the Planning Commission and after eight years, this proposal is being considered now. That means, the previous Government did not do anything about it. When this proposal is coming up now, I would like to bring some of the problems before the House.

There was a proposal to plan a certain tree called Jatropha, by which bio-diesel could be produced. At that time, according to the calculations, it was told that Rs.3,000 crore worth of bio-diesel would be produced by the railways' wastelands. That would have been very good, but I do not know whether something has happened to that. If the hon. Railway Minister could enlighten this House as to what happened to that proposal, it would be useful.

When 43,000 hectares of vacant land is going to be developed, I would like to bring forth one of my apprehensions. It is said that more than 2,000 hectares of land is under encroachment. Everyone knew that for the last 50-60 years, very poor, landless people are finding some place to stay along the railway lines; maybe good or maybe bad – that is a different matter, but they are staying there. There are also some shops on the railway lands, run by people. Does the new proposal mean throwing away of those people mindlessly? Does it mean complete eviction of those people? I would request the hon. Minister to think twice about it. It would be very unfortunate if those people are just thrown out, because you have a plan to develop the lands. I would say that you have to have some alternate arrangements for them.

There is another thing that I would like to bring to your notice. Railway land is not actually the land purchased by the Railways or owned by the Railways. Railway land is given by the States, either free of cost or on lease. So, the State Governments should be consulted before the Authority takes its decision to develop the land. Their opinion should also be taken into consideration on how these lands should be developed.

While welcoming this Bill, I would like to ask whether this Authority which they are going to set up, the Railway Land Development Authority, was necessary at all to develop those lands. For this Authority, rules are to be framed by the Government.

MR. SPEAKER: We want to finish it by 2 o'clock.

I will conclude in a minute. Everything is being done by the Government. But now you want to constitute another Authority under the Ministry. I feel that the Ministry itself could have done this development work without going in for another Authority. This is what I would like to say.

Anyway, I extend my support to this Bill. Our apprehension is that the landless poor will be thrown out of their dwelling units or their workplace and I would request that the House should be assured that it would not happen. Thank you.