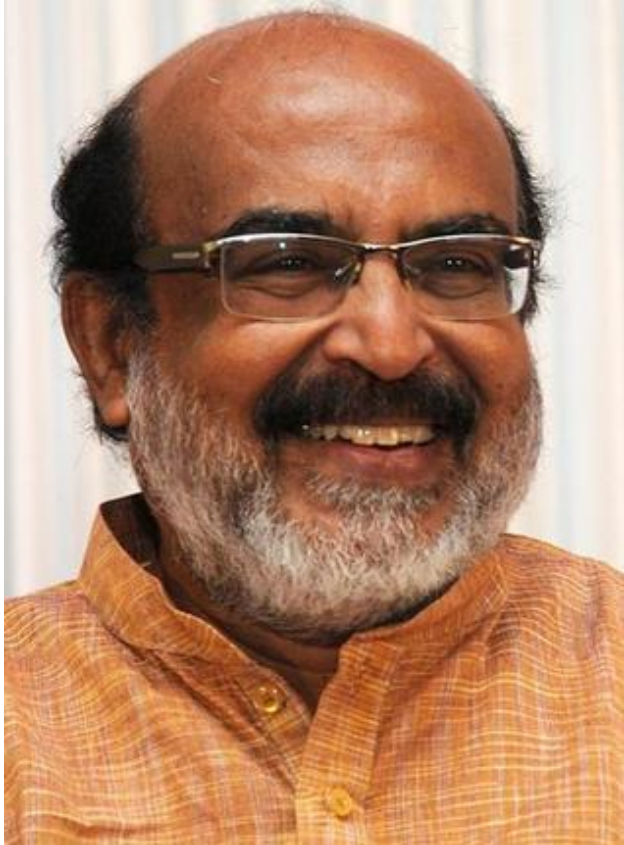


Kerala regrets failure to enforce minimum wages in cashew sector

Vinson Kurian



Thomas Isaac

The Hindu

Conclave with African suppliers under way

Thiruvananthapuram, June 28:

Kerala has pleaded helplessness with respect to not having enforced minimum wages in the cashew sector, and blamed it on fears of reprisal from processing industries employing lakhs of workers.

If they chose to shut down operations and migrate to other state, it would make a bad situation more ugly, Finance Minister Thomas Isaac said here.

“There is no big capital being invested in what is largely a footloose industry,” he said while addressing a diplomatic conclave here on ‘Cashew trade for common good’ attended by representatives from supplier nations in Africa. The livelihood of an estimated three lakh labourers, mostly women, is at stake here, the minister said. The sector is already dogged by underemployment.

This is the context against which the conclave is being held, and was unique. “We must introspect and see how we can collaborate to achieve mutually beneficial goals here,” the minister said.

Middlemen’s role

First of all, the state government would like to discourage middlemen from operating in the sector. The state and supplier nations could look at ways of direct procurement of raw nuts by a designated Kerala government agency.

Adequate procedures need to be adopted to ensure remunerative prices to cashew farmers in the supplier nations as also to ensure required supplies to processing industries in Kerala.

Ending corruption

“We want to eliminate corruption in all forms in the business. Transparent procedures have to be adopted to ensure the same,” the minister said.

Secondly, cashew farmers could benefit from the technological competencies available in research centres and universities in Kerala with respect to innovative farming.

Technological collaboration would be of help to popularise hybrid varieties of cashew in the supplier nations, besides improving their stock and productivity.

The third and most important area of collaboration is in the cashew products value chain, Thomas Isacc said. “We could think of a Africa-Kerala or Africa-Kollam brand of cashew nuts that the Kerala government would promote.”

The conclave may discuss how to go about achieving this and whether Kerala and the African nations could form joint ventures to take this idea forward, the minister said.

(This article was published on June 28, 2017)

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