

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE AND FARMERS WELFARE
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH & EDUCATION

LOK SABHA
UNSTARRED QUESTION NO. 1380
TO BE ANSWERED ON 3RD DECEMBER, 2024

CLASSIFICATION OF ARECANUT BY WHO

1380. SHRI RAJMOHAN UNNITHAN:

Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE AND FARMERS WELFARE कृषि और किसान कल्याण मंत्री be pleased to state:

- (a) whether it is a fact that Arecanut is an essential horticultural crop playing a significant role in religious, social and cultural functions across the country, if so, the details thereof;
- (b) whether the Government is aware the challenges faced by Arecanut farmers following the classification of Arecanut as carcinogenic by the World Health Organization (WHO) based on several Research and Review Papers, however, on scrutiny of such Papers critically, it is found that in most of the Papers the data were collected on chewing mixtures such as Betel quid, Gutka etc., leading to wrong conclusions, if so, the details thereof and the action taken by the Government in this regard;
- (c) whether the Government is also aware that on the contrary of the above classification there are several Research Papers which state that Arecanut is not cancerous but anticancerous, if so, the reaction of the Government on these findings;
- (d) whether the Government will interfere in this matter advocating the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) for a review of this classification; and
- (e) if not, the reasons therefor?

ANSWER

THE MINISTER OF STATE FOR AGRICULTURE AND FARMERS WELFARE
कृषि और किसान कल्याण राज्य मंत्री (SHRI BHAGIRATH CHOUDHARY)

(a): Yes. Arecanut is used as a masticatory ingredient either with betel leaves or as plain or as scented supari. Traditionally it is being used as “Thambula” after food. It finds a place in all religious, social and cultural functions in India. Arecanut has uses in ayurvedic and veterinary medicines because of its several alkaloids.

(b) & (c): Yes. The Government is aware of the challenges faced by arecanut farmers. It's noticed that certain research papers on the health effects of arecanut,

which are quoted by WHO, have methodological limitations, leading to inconclusive reports. Notably, most of these studies focused on the health impacts of chewing mixtures, such as betel quid and gutka, which contain arecanut along with other ingredients. These studies have not indicated the sole & specific effects of consumption of arecanut isolate on human health.

A systematic review of the available literature was conducted by multi-institutional stakeholders at Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR)-Central Plantation Crops Research Institute, Kasaragod in November 2023. This review revealed that the arecoline (alkaloid in arecanut) dosage used in these experiments was of a higher concentration compared to that released during normal chewing. Some studies have also revealed that arecoline, in lesser doses, has been found to inhibit tumour growth.

(d) & (e): To address the knowledge gap and provide conclusive evidence on the health effects of arecanut, the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare has planned to undertake a study titled "Evidence-Based Research on Arecanut and Human Health." This study brings together around 16 national and state-level agencies dealing with medical research, including All India Institute of Medical Science (AIIMS), Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR)-Centre for cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB), Indian Institute of Science (IISc), and others, to conduct detailed research on the effect of arecanut on human health.
