

Fresh promise of licenses to unauthorised tobacco growers

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A fresh promise of issuing licenses has been made to the unauthorised tobacco growers, who are facing the prospect of paying penalties when they are already reeling under the impact of a collapse in prices of low grade variety.

Pratap Simha, Lok Sabha MP, assured to take a delegation of farmers' leaders to the Union Commerce Minister to press for licenses for unauthorised tobacco growers in the State. The assurance came when farmers were pouring out their woes at a meeting convened by Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha (KRRS) and Hasiru Sene at Periyapatna on November 28. Incidentally, the assurance comes at a time



Unauthorised tobacco growers of the State are already reeling under the impact of a collapse in the prices of low grade variety.

when campaigning is underway for byelections in neighbouring Hunsur Assembly segment, which is also home to a large number of tobacco growers.

A.H. Vishwanath, former Minister, who is seeking re-election from Hunsur as a BJP candidate, had to face uncomfortable questions. He assured farmers that Mr. Simha would be taking up the issue with the Union Commerce Minister. More than 20,000 farmers of the estimated 70,000 cultivate tobacco in the State without valid licenses and pay 15% of the proceeds of the sale as well as ₹2 for every kg as penalty.

About 100 million kg of tobacco is grown on an estimated 70,000 acres of land mostly in Periyapatna, Hunsur, H.D. Kote and K.R. Nagar taluks in Mysuru district, besides parts of Hassan district.

The Tobacco Board collects about ₹20 to ₹25 crore in the form of penalty every year from unauthorised cultivators of tobacco, said president of VFC Tobacco Growers' Federation of Karnataka Javare Gowda.

The meeting in Periyapatna also discussed difficulties farmers were facing on account of a drop in prices of low grade variety of tobacco. While the good bright variety was commanding a price of ₹170 per kg and the medium grade variety was fetching ₹150 per kg, the price of low grade had plummeted to less than 100 per kg from last year's ₹120 per kg.

The farmers urged the people's representatives to direct the Tobacco Board officials to take necessary steps to ensure that the traders paid a better price to the farmers. Mr. Gowda said the board, which fixes a ceiling on the crop size, should fix a minimum guaranteed price for different varieties of tobacco so that the farmer receives a fair remuneration for his produce.

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