

Proposed bill to amend law on cigarettes, tobacco products to aggravate job crisis: FAIFA

FAIFA said the COTPA amendment will have detrimental effect on the livelihoods of FCV farmers who cannot grow any other equally remunerative crop in their dry and arid regions.

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Image of tobacco used for representational purpose. (File Photo)

By PTI

NEW DELHI: The proposed bill to amend the law regarding cigarettes and other tobacco products will aggravate the unemployment crisis amid the second wave of COVID-19 and the livelihoods of millions of small shop owners and kirana stores at stake, farmers' body FAIFA said on Monday.

FAIFA, which claims to represent farmers and farm workers of commercial crops across Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka and Gujarat, also said the proposed COTPA (Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act) Amendment Bill, 2020 if implemented will have a "further detrimental effect on the livelihoods of FCV (Flue Cured Virginia) farmers who cannot grow any other equally remunerative crop in their dry and arid regions".

The amendment of COTPA proposed by the Ministry of Health disallows retail sale of loose sticks of cigarettes, prohibits sale of tobacco products to persons below 21 years, put controls on in-shop advertising and promotion, amongst others.

"Livelihoods of millions of small shop owners and kirana stores are at stake who are struggling to earn their living during the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic," FAIFA President Javare Gowda said in a statement.

The proposed COTPA Amendments will aggravate the unemployment crisis amid COVID-19, he added.

As for tobacco farmers, he said policy makers have been implementing harsh tobacco regulations, however, there has been no talk or action taken regarding their actual problems.

"Adverse proposals under the COTPA Amendment Bill if implemented will have a further detrimental effect on the livelihoods of FCV farmers who cannot grow any other equally remunerative crop in their dry and arid regions," said Gowda, who was among participants in a webinar organised on the 'World No Tobacco Day'.

Consumer Online Foundation (COF), Patient Safety & Access Initiative of India Foundation (PSAIIF), the Aware Consumer (TAC) and Healthy You Foundation in association with PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PHDCCI) had organised the discussion.

"Given India's tobacco consumption pattern, which is predominant in the form of chewing tobacco, the government should give priority to regulating the unbranded and illegal tobacco products.

The thrust of its awareness programme should be in the villages and tier-III towns instead of big cities where consumers are already aware," PSAIIF Founder Director and Founder Trustee, COF, Bejon Kumar Misra, said.

Citing a study done by it, Public Response Against Helplessness and Action for Redressal (PRAHAR) President Abhay Raj Mishra said there is a huge discontentment among petty retailers, a majority of who feels threatened because of drastic increase in penalties and making offences cognizable in the proposed amendments in the COTPA law.

"The respondents feel that if the amendments get implemented, it will increase harassment by authorities even for small issues or will breed corruption.

Thirty-three per cent of the respondents feel that they will have to shut shop to save themselves from such high levels of harassment and corruption and will ultimately lose their livelihood," Mishra added.

Source: <https://www.newindianexpress.com/business/2021/may/31/proposed-bill-to-amend-law-on-cigarettes-tobacco-products-to-aggravate-job-crisis-faifa-2309935.html>