

## **Trade unions seek alternative job opportunities for beedi workers**

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Representatives of different trade unions have urged the Centre to provide viable alternative employment opportunities to beedi workers before adopting any 'anti-tobacco' policy.

Addressing presspersons in Mangaluru on Tuesday, Balakrishna Shetty, president of the Dakshina Kannada unit of Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU), said that around 30 lakh farmers have taken up tobacco cultivation in the country. Another 20 lakh people are involved in plucking tendu leaves (used for rolling beedis), and 80 lakh people roll beedis.

Stating that the policies of the Centre are affecting the livelihood of these people, he said these 1.3 crore people will not have any alternative means of subsisting their families without beedi industry. The Centre should come out a policy framework with alternative job opportunities for these people, he said.

Giving the details of beedi workers in coastal Karnataka and Kasaragod of Kerala, he said Dakshina Kannada district has around 3.5 lakh beedi labourers who roll beedis, Udupi and Kasaragod districts have around 1 lakh each. Their livelihood will be affected with the 'anti-tobacco' policies of the Centre, he added.

Shetty said representatives from AITUC, CITU, Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS), Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS) and Beedi Contractors' Union held a protest march against the policies of the Centre in Mangaluru on Tuesday.

Seeking the intervention of Bandaru Dattatreya, Union Minister for Labour and Employment, on safeguarding the interests of beedi workers in the country, he said these unions will take a march to Delhi – 'Delhi Chalo' -- if their demands are not met.

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