

Beedi workers left in the lurch



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Women rolling beedis in Karimnagar. --Photo: Thakur Ajay Pal Singh

<p>BARE REALITY</p> <p>More than two lakh beedi workers denied of employment in Karimnagar</p>	<p>7 lakh beedi workers working in the sector in Telangana</p>	<p>Beedi workers paid Rs. 100 to Rs. 120 for rolling 1,000 beedies against norms of Rs. 153</p>	<p>Beedi industry is an alternative employment in rural and urban areas in the district</p>	<p>Beedi industry is ray of hope in Sircilla textile town as it rescued the weavers during the crisis in the power loom sector</p>
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Since the closure of beedi units due to Health Ministry's directive on pictorial warning, many workers have lost employment

crisis is looming large over the beedi industry with the closure of beedi units from April 1 following denial of employment to over two lakh beedi workers in Karimnagar district.

The beedi units were opposing the Union Health Ministry's directive of printing larger pictorial warning of crossed bones and skull and picture of cancer chest and mouth on beedi packets. The government instructed the beedi companies to print 85 per cent of the beedi packet space with the pictorial warning. But, the beedi companies wanted the government to continue with the existing 50 per cent space for pictorial warning.

The beedi companies have already launched protests and went on strike for 10 days in February opposing the move on larger-sized pictorial warning. However, the Union government stood firm on its decision on bigger pictorial warning from April 1.

Stating that the printing of enlarged pictorial warning would affect their business, which is already in doldrums following invasion of mini-cigarettes, the beedi companies announced the closure of companies from April 1. Following closure of units, beedi workers particularly the womenfolk were left in the lurch without employment.

Says Anuradha, a beedi worker in Karimnagar, the beedi companies have stopped issuance of tendu leaves and tobacco from a week ago. "We used to roll beedies and run the families. But, we have lost our livelihood with the closure of companies," she complained.

In Sircilla textile town, women used to add to the income of underpaid powerloom workers by rolling beedies. Goli Kalpana, a widow in Sircilla, said she used to eke out a living by rolling beedies. The closure of companies would displace her and force them to commit suicide, she added.

Telangana Beedi Worker's Federation State secretary Samalla Malleshram said that closure of beedi companies was creating unrest in the district with the loss of jobs. Women beedi workers in rural areas used to get work under the NREGS. But, the condition of women beedi workers in urban areas is worse as they do not have any alternative employment, he maintained.

He said that the government should rethink about its decision of enlarged pictorial warning s on beedi packets in the interest of beedi workers. Or else the government should provide alternative jobs to the beedi workers before closing down the industry, he demanded.

Printing of enlarged pictorial warning will affect their business, which is already in doldrums, say managements

