

TAMIL NADU

For beedi workers it's all work and no pay

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**They are yet to get their wages, thanks to demonetisation**

Sixty-seven-year-old A. Govindasamy has been rolling beedis for a living since the age of 10. Going through struggles is not new for him, but he vouches that he has not been through such a crisis of working without wages for days.

For hundreds of beedi workers in the district, demonetisation, in short, has meant going without their daily wages. The withdrawal of Rs. 500 and Rs. 1,000 notes has hit their livelihood, with beedi contractors unable to pay them daily due to cash crunch.

There are nearly 75,000 beedi workers in the district particularly in Katpadi, Melvisharam, Pernambut, Gudiyatham, Ambur and Tirupattur. Other districts such as Tirunelveli, Kanyakumari, Erode and Tiruvallur districts also have a significant population of beedi workers, according to M.P. Ramachandran, president of Tamil Nadu Beedi Thozhilalar Sammelanam.

“The two notes were withdrawn without adequate preparation. This has badly affected beedi workers. Business has been hit by at least 35 per cent in Vellore. The workers have not received wages for more than two weeks,” he added.

A section of workers in Vijayaraghavapuram, which is home to several beedi workers, said they have not received their wages properly in the last three weeks. On an average, the workers are paid Rs. 300 a day for rolling 1,500 beedis.

“I get Rs. 155 if I roll 1,000 beedis a day. The amount is low for retired persons like me. Beedi contractors are unable to pay us. In all these years, I have not faced such a situation of severe cash crunch,” Mr. Govindasamy, who rolls beedis for at least 12 hours at his house, said.



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