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State Rats On Assurance To High Court

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 THIS STORY IS FROM JANUARY 21, 2015

State rats on assurance to high court

[Banjot Kaur Bhatia](#) / TNN / Updated: Jan 21, 2015, 23:27 IST

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Patna: The [Bihar government](#) ratted on its assurance given to none other than the [Patna high court](#) when it reduced tax on tobacco products from 30% to 20% this Tuesday. A high-level meeting at the level of chief secretary on July 25, 2014 has decided, among other things, "to raise taxes on all tobacco products, including 'beedi' and 'khaini', to at least 60 to 70% in coordination with commercial taxes department", a Patna high court judgment quoting from a counter-affidavit of the state government said on August 11, while disposing of a writ petition alleging poor implementation of anti-tobacco law in the state. [CM Jitan Ram Manjhi](#) made a similar announcement while addressing children at a public rally in November last. So, what prompted the government to renege on its promise? The commercial taxes department wrote a letter to the health department in November 2014, saying the increase in taxes has lead to loss of revenue and promoted blackmarketing as neighbouring states have lower taxes. The letter said a cigarette major paid only Rs 63 crore in 2014 as against Rs 94 crore in 2013. Tax on tobacco products was increased from 20% to 30% in 2014, it may be mentioned. However, this argument holds true for only one cigarette firm. The same letter says revenue from sale of cigarettes made by two other firms did not decline in 2014. Interestingly, a subnote in this letter states the data were collected by the Patna circle officer on telephone only. The same letter says the revenue between 2011 and 2013 did not decline at all though tax was

only on telephone only. The same letter says the revenue between 2011 and 2013 did not decline at all though tax was increased during that period also. In reply to this letter, the health department said it was a myth to say that increase in tax has led to loss of revenue and spurt in blackmarketing. "The truth is blackmarketing is a serious concern, but the experience across the world shows increase in tax leads to increase in revenue and saved lives in scores," the health department said and quoted examples of both developing and developed nations to drive home the point. The commercial taxes department's plea has puzzled [Socio Economic Educational Development Society](#)'s executive director Deepak Mishra. "The government can't stop antisocial elements indulging in blackmarketing. So should the health of people be put at risk?" he asked TOI. There are at least 100 national and international studies, including that of a World Bank, which say a 10% increase in tobacco brings down the consumption by 5% to 10% in low and middle-income countries. Civil society members also point out that a recent central government study showed that the Bihar government spends Rs 1,341 crore annually on tobacco-related illnesses. "Isn't this a loss of revenue?" asked T P Sinha of [Cancer Awareness Society](#). Even doctors are up in arms against this move. Indian Medical Association's national vice-president and cancer expert Dr J K Singh described the cut in tax as a "highly regressive step". "Over 60,000 people die of cancer in Bihar every year and 40% of them die of cancers caused by tobacco," he said and rued Bihar is on way to become cancer capital of India, probably of the world.

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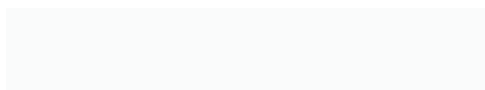
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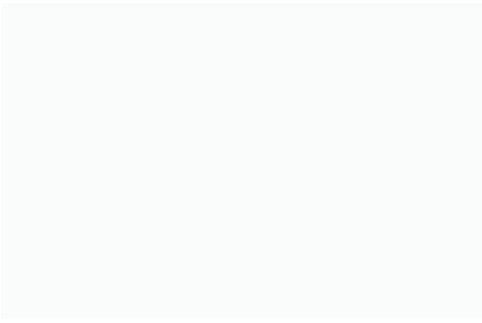
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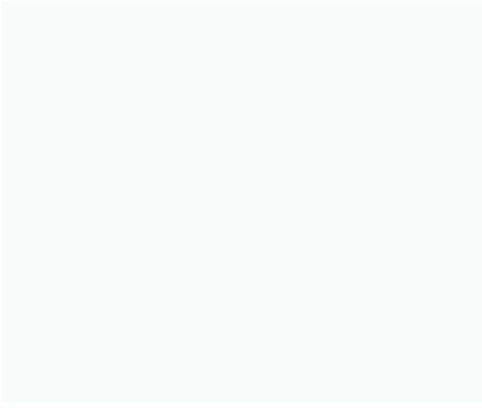
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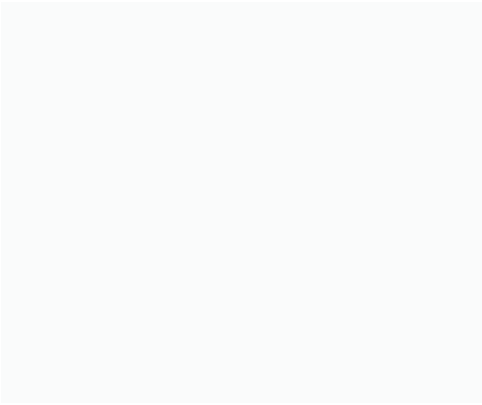
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