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Karnataka urged to phase out tobacco farming

Enhance VAT on tobacco products to discourage its use, urged CM

March 07, 2015 12:00 am | Updated 08:11 am IST - MYSURU:

R. KRISHNA KUMAR

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The Anti-Tobacco Forum in Mysuru wants the State government to enhance VAT on tobacco products to discourage its use.— PHOTO: M.A. SRIRAM

In the run-up to the State Budget, the Anti-Tobacco Forum in Mysuru has urged Chief Minister Siddaramaiah to initiate measures to phase out tobacco farming and enhance VAT on tobacco products to discourage its use.

Tobacco is one of the major commercial crops cultivated in the district, but India is also a signatory to the UN Framework Convention on Tobacco Control according to which it is obligatory to phase out its cultivation by 2020.

The forum said the Chief Minister should take a cue from the Union Budget, which increased tax on tobacco products and further increase VAT. Forum convenor Vasanthkumar Mysoremath told *The Hindu* that hundreds of crores spent on healthcare can be saved by reducing tobacco consumption and the revenue thus saved could be channelised to rehabilitate farmers who shift to alternative crops.

“Compared to our neighbouring States, Karnataka has the lowest VAT on tobacco products and the forthcoming budget is an opportunity to reverse the scenario,” he said.

The forum pointed out that several States had gradually increased tax on tobacco products. In Rajasthan, tax was increased from 20 per cent in 2010–11 to 40 per cent in 2011–12, 50 per cent in 2012–13 and 65 per cent in 2013–14.

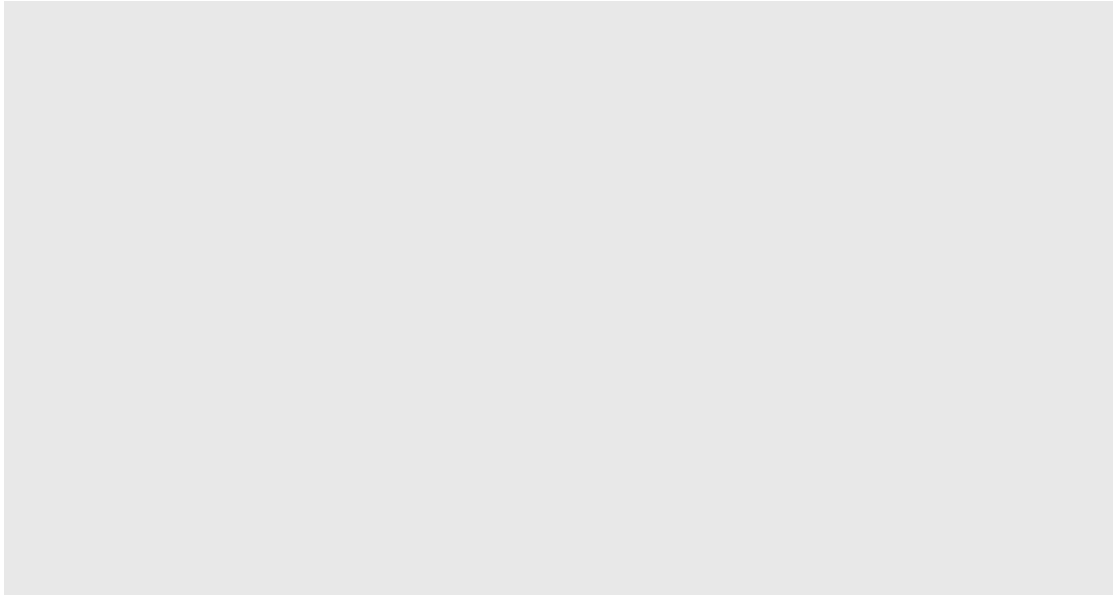
Mr. Mysoremath claimed this led to a fiscal gain of nearly Rs. 900 crore and helped save thousands of lives as tobacco consumption dropped by 17 per cent in that State.

“But in Karnataka, tax on cigarettes, beedis and other tobacco products was low,” he said.


Mr. Mysoremath, who has been campaigning for ban on tobacco cultivation, said he expected the government to use budget as an instrument to give shape to a policy to encourage horticulture as an alternative to tobacco. Flue-cured Virginia tobacco is cultivated in Hunsur, Periyapatna, H.D. Kote and parts of Nanjangud and there are nearly 75,000 growers in the region who,

incidentally, are seeking reduction in taxes on tobacco products.

But Mr. Mysoremath argued that a 10 per cent increase in tax will lead to a decline in consumption and save lives.



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