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EMINENT CITIZENS URGE KERALA GOVT. TO RAISE TAXES ON TOBACCO PRODUCTS

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As the date for the presentation of the Kerala Budget approaches, several eminent citizens have appealed to the state government to raise taxes on all tobacco products to 65 per cent.

In separate letters to State Finance Minister K M Mani, they said that taxing tobacco products would not only help save many precious lives but could also bring in much-needed revenues to the state exchequer.

Renowned dramatist, poet and theatre personality Kavalam Narayana Panikker said, "Taxing tobacco products will prevent draining away of precious resources on induced and preventable morbidity. With one stroke of your pen, you can save so many lives in Kerala."

Former Kerala University Vice-Chancellor G Balamohanam Thampy said, "At a time when our state is facing a huge resource crunch, taxing tobacco products can prove to be a major avenue for resource mobilisation."

Well-known filmmaker Shaji N Karun said, "Increasing the price of tobacco through higher taxes is the single most effective way to encourage tobacco users to quit and to prevent children from starting to smoke."

Economist S Irudaya Rajan, Professor, Centre for Development Studies here, cited the example of Rajasthan to point out that a tax increase could lead to greater revenues.

"The Rajasthan Government has consistently increased taxes on tobacco products over the last years and the tobacco tax in the state is currently peaking at an all-India high of 65 per cent. Currently the state earns revenue of Rs 312.08 crores from taxes on bidis. Cigarettes also show an upward trend in tax revenues; the earnings rose from Rs 62.80 crores in 2009-10 to Rs 139.23 crores in 2011-12."

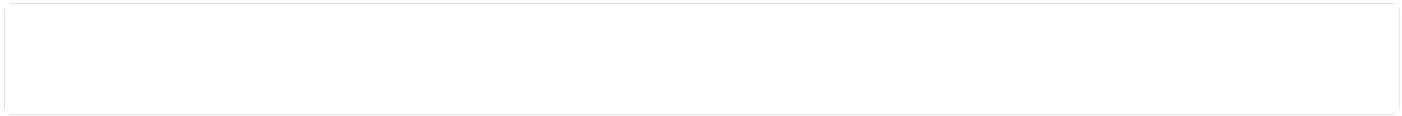
Well-known cardiologist and Head, Department of Cardiology, PRS Hospital Tiny Nair said, "As a doctor, I see the impact of tobacco every day. The disease, suffering and death which tobacco cause are terrible. As a doctor, I try to cure those suffering but as a human being, I am convinced that we need to prevent the problem in the first place. I urge to increase VAT on all tobacco products to 65 per cent in our state."

Justice K P Balachandran; former Director of Encyclopaedic Publications George Onakkoor; former Director General of Police K P Somarajan; retired Principal, Government Arts College, Thrissur C G Rajagopal; Gender economist S Radha; neurologist R Anandam; cardiologist G Girija; Paediatrician T Suresh Kumar; IMA Research Cell chairman Sreejith N Kumar and former police official K N Janarajan have also written to the Government calling for a hike in taxes on all tobacco products to 65 per cent.

There are around 55 lakh tobacco users in Kerala and a study conducted by the Johns Hopkins University, USA has shown that as many as 4.54 lakh precious lives can be saved or early deaths averted if VAT on tobacco products is increased to 65 per cent.

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