

## ‘Biggest blow’: RSS body opposes pictorial warning on beedi packs by Centre

*The Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh, which is an affiliate of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, has asked the central ministry to view beedi as separate from other tobacco products and formulate new policies accordingly.*

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Taking up cudgels for them, the RSS body underscored that workers in this agro-forest-based industry are predominantly unorganised and uneducated. (Photo: Reuter)

The Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS) has opposed the union health ministry's notification for allowing pictorial warning on beedi packages, claiming it will be "the biggest blow" to the industry that employs over 4.5 crore people.

The body, which is an affiliate of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, has asked the ministry to view beedi as separate from other tobacco products and formulate new policies accordingly.

In May, the Union ministry of health and family welfare issued a notification specifying new health warnings on tobacco packs that will be enforced from September 1. All tobacco products will have to come with pictorial warning about the ill-effects of using them.

Pointing out that there is no nodal agency to address the concerns of those dependent on the beedi industry, the BMS said the Labour Ministry and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) have tried to find alternate livelihoods for beedi workers. The attempts, said the BMS, have not succeeded as a large number of workers employed here are mostly uneducated women from OBC, SC and ST categories and minorities.

"...Similarly, the ministry of agriculture has tried to find alternative crops for tobacco and is spending crores of rupees every year to encourage farmers to grow alternative crops. All these attempts have failed. The Tobacco Research Institute could not convince the farmers to grow other crops," the BMS said in a statement. It blamed the multiplicity of authorities for the lack of comprehensive policy on beedi. "Almost seven ministries are dealing with this subject. Each ministry is thinking differently...Ultimately it is the workforce which becomes the victim of the wrong and

lopsided policies of the central government. To formulate a comprehensive policy, the government should form an inter-ministerial committee comprising labour, health, agriculture, commerce, finance, forest, tribal affairs, home affairs, women and child welfare and skill development. This committee should suggest an action plan within a month after tripartite consultations,” the statement said.

Taking up cudgels for them, the RSS body underscored that workers in this agro-forest-based industry are predominantly unorganised and uneducated.

“Entire rural and small industries in the country are witnessing huge job losses, particularly among rural areas and unorganised sector workers, under crisis due to unprecedented pandemic. In such a situation, this is the most inappropriate time for the government to amend the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act, 2003 (COTPA),” the BMS said.

**Source:** <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/biggest-blow-rss-body-opposes-pictorial-warning-on-beedi-packs-by-centre/story-KBWmyGss5ls8ws59XSqbbJ.html>