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Title: Need to provide remunerative price to tobacco growers in Prakasham district of Andhra Pradesh.

SHRI Y.V. SUBBA REDDY (ONGOLE): Madam Speaker, tobacco purchases are becoming a farce in Andhra Pradesh every year. ITC and other tobacco companies, on one pretext or the other, are forming a cartel and fleecing tobacco farmers by not paying remunerative price. This year, tobacco companies, showing pictorial warning as the reason, have given farmers much lower price than what they are entitled to.

There are no buyers for F3 variety of tobacco. About a month ago, F3 variety of tobacco was purchased for Rs. 140 and Rs. 145 but now, they are purchasing it between Rs. 120 and Rs. 130. For medium grade, they are paying just between Rs. 105 and Rs. 100 and for low grade, they are paying between Rs. 65 and Rs. 80 per kilogram. The main purchaser is ITC which purchases 50 per cent of the crop every year but this year, ITC has so far purchased only 20 per cent and 30 per cent and the total purchases so far are just 24 per cent.

Even after 60 days of the beginning of tobacco purchases, only 20 per cent purchases have been made against the expected 65 per cent. The Tobacco Board has started auction from 25<sup>th</sup> February in some areas and from 11<sup>th</sup> March in other areas. The main problem is that companies are taking shelter under new pictorial warning but you are aware that pictorial warnings are not new. They are there and only the size has been changing as per the directions of the Government. Tobacco companies are now showing this as a *bhoot* to the farmers and have reduced the price which is resulting in problems to the farmers.

In view of the above, I request, through this House, the Minister of Commerce to intervene immediately and rescue the tobacco farmers of Prakasham district of Andhra Pradesh by ensuring that they get remunerative price. Otherwise, those farmers will resort to suicides like last year.

So, I request immediate intervention of the hon. Minister of Commerce.