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Deadlock over tobacco purchase issue persists

By Our Correspondent

SWABI, July 19: Officials of the district administration and representatives of tobacco growers on Monday failed to break the deadlock over different issues relating to tobacco purchase.

However, they agreed to continue negotiations and representatives of multinational and national tobacco purchasing companies would join them on Tuesday, said sources.

The talks were held in the office of District Coordination Officer Abdul Jabar Shah. District Awami National Party president Rehmanullah, provincial PPP-S deputy general secretary Masood Jabar, former Jamaat-i-Islami MNA Usman Khan, Kashthkar Coordination Council (KCC) general secretary Laiquat Yusufzai, Kisan Board president Khalid Khan, Aiwan-i-Zaraat president Mohammad Ali and representatives of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Anjuman-i-Kashthkaran and Ittehad Kashthkaran participated in the negotiations.

One of the growers' demands was that the companies should not reject tobacco for devaluing the crop, according to the sources. The DCO assured the growers to settle the issue. The sources said the DCO might direct leaf

managers of the companies to stop the rejection practice.

An insider said under this strategy the companies picked the good quality tobacco and declared the low quality produce surplus, forcing the farmers to sell it at throwaway prices to agents of the companies.

The issue of tobacco prices was also discussed, said the sources. The growers rejected the companies' average rate of Rs108 to Rs110 per kilogramme saying their expenditure was Rs150 on one kg production.

The growers were against inviting leaf managers for the talks saying the companies' directors should attend the meeting since only they could accept their demands.

If the tripartite talks were successful, the Pakistan Tobacco Board (PTB) could be involved to settle the issue of prices, said the sources. Fixing tobacco prices, they said, was the domain of the Pakistan Tobacco Board and it would make a decision with consensus of the companies.

The growers have warned to continue their protest if the talks on Tuesday remained inconclusive.