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## **Plea to review building tax reforms**

Special Correspondent

Thiruvananthapuram: The district committee of the Licensed Engineers and Supervisors Federation (LENSFED) has urged the government to review the revised building tax.

Addressing a press conference here on Monday, State president of the federation Punchakari Surendran, district president S. Salim and secretary S. Rajendran said the newly-introduced self-assessment method had resulted in an increase of 100 to 300 per cent in the tax. They said the unscientific system of assessment had fixed the basic tax itself at a high level.

The federation leaders said the master plans or town planning schemes of most cities in Kerala were over 30 years old. They observed that efforts to revise the zonal regulations had failed to take off. The leaders said revision of master plans and town planning schemes was imperative to revitalise the construction sector.

The federation alleged that the ban imposed on sand-mining from rivers at many places was unscientific. "The ban has only led to the creation of the sand mafia and a thriving black market in river sand. Scientific measures based on studies are called for if the objective is to mitigate the environmental impact of sand mining," Mr. Rajendran said. Highlighting the need to promote the manufacture of sand from crushed rock in the government and cooperative sectors, he called for steps to popularise the alternative material.

The federation urged the government to exempt fallow lands from the ban on construction in paddy fields. Mr. Rajendran said the blanket ban was preventing hundreds of landowners from constructing houses. He called on the government to activate the local committees constituted to assess the status of paddy fields and recommend their utilisation for housing. He also

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demanded permission to construct upper floors on existing houses in farmland.

The federation alleged that officials in local self-government institutions were demanding hefty bribes for clearance of building plans. Mr. Rajendran appealed to the government to enforce the one-day building permit scheme for buildings up to 300 sq. metres and impose a definite timeframe for sanction of plans. The federation will stage a dharna before the office of the Municipal Director here on Tuesday.