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# Anti-smoking activists in Kerala oppose I&B ministry decision

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By IANS,

Thiruvananthapuram : Anti-smoking activists in Kerala are up in arms over the decision of the union information and broadcasting ministry, to keep in abeyance the rules issued by the health ministry on tobacco-free movies and television shows.

As brought out from RTI applications filed by civil society groups, the I&B ministry has asked the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) to “maintain status quo and adhere to the certification process as was being done before the issue of the (October) notification.”

It has also asked the health ministry to keep the notification in “abeyance till the time the practical difficulties faced by the film industry are resolved amicably”.

Justice K. Narayana Kurup, a former judge of the Kerala High Court who delivered the pioneering ruling banning smoking in public places back in 1999, described the I&B ministry’s stance as “undoubtedly a rude shock” and a “retrograde step neutralising the gains already achieved in the field of anti-tobacco drives and luring hundreds of thousands of youth to the mesmerizing hold of tobacco”.

“If smoking scenes go without warning scrolls, it will end up in picturing a world that informs people, especially the youth, about the acceptance and prevalence of tobacco use in society, emasculating and neutralising the beneficial effect produced by the COTP (Control of Tobacco Products) legislation,” said Kurup.

The Health and I&B Ministries have been on a dissenting mode ever since the former issued a gazette notification in October last on the depiction of tobacco products or tobacco use in movies and television.

Among others, the notification called for a mandatory display of health warning scroll during the duration of the scene, and a health message of 30 seconds, each in the beginning and middle of films and television programmes.

Roscotte Krishna Pillai, former director of Press Information Bureau and former member, Advisory Panels for Film Certification and CBFC said that the I&B Ministry had issued clear guidelines to the CBFC.

“It now comes as a shock that the resultant good effect that this decision has had on the society at large and the succour it brought to millions of smokers and non-smokers alike has been nullified by the recent decision of the I&B Ministry to do away with tobacco-free movies and television rules,” said Pillai.

Studies and surveys conducted to understand the influence of movies and television on tobacco use have pointed out the positive correlation between the two.

“Fans, especially youngsters, blindly emulate screen action and it is important that filmmakers exercise greater restraint considering that tobacco use is the single largest cause of cancers in the country,” said Dr.K.Ramdas, medical superintendent, Regional Cancer Centre.

Concerned by the influence that onscreen smoking has on film-goers, the High-level Committee formed for tobacco control in

Kerala, headed by the Principal Secretary (Health) Rajeev Sadanandan, has decided to take up the matter of depiction of smoking screens with the Malayalam film industry.

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