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Despite ban, sale of tobacco continues in city

Loophole in regulations being exploited by companies: health officer

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STAFF REPORTER

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Minister for Health U.T. Khader, City Police Commissioner of Police Raghavendra H. Auradkar along with health and police officials at a shop selling tobacco products during an awareness drive in Bangalore on Saturday. Photo: K. Gopinathan

Urban District Health Officer Rajani M. has called for an amendment to the Food Safety and Standards (Prohibition and Restrictions on Sales) Regulations, 2011. This in the light of the fact that though the government has banned the sale of gutka and pan masala that contain tobacco or nicotine on May 31, companies are subverting the ban by selling sachets of tobacco separately.

According to her, the gutka industry was exploiting a loophole in the law and selling tobacco leaves separately.

Explaining the loophole, she said that the Food Safety and Standards (Prohibition and Restriction on Sales) Regulations, 2011, prohibits the sale of food items containing tobacco and nicotine. "But loose tobacco is being sold to people who are later mixing them with other products. Since the law prohibits the sale of gutka with other food items, the industry lobby is contending that loose tobacco can be sold. There is a need to amend the regulations so that tobacco is not sold in separate sachets," she said here on Saturday during the drive to weed out illegal advertisements pertaining to tobacco products.

Health Minister U.T. Khader, City Police Commissioner Raghavendra Auradkar and Additional Police Commissioner Kamal Panth inspected four tea shops on Infantry Road and its surroundings as a part of the drive to get illegal advertisements removed from shops selling cigarettes and pan masala. Mr. Khader directed the shopkeepers to display pictorial warnings of the consequences of consuming tobacco and its products.

Section 5 of the Cigarette and Other Tobacco Products Act (COTPA) places restrictions on the advertisement of cigarettes or any other tobacco product and also makes it mandatory for a health warning to be placed in each of the stalls.

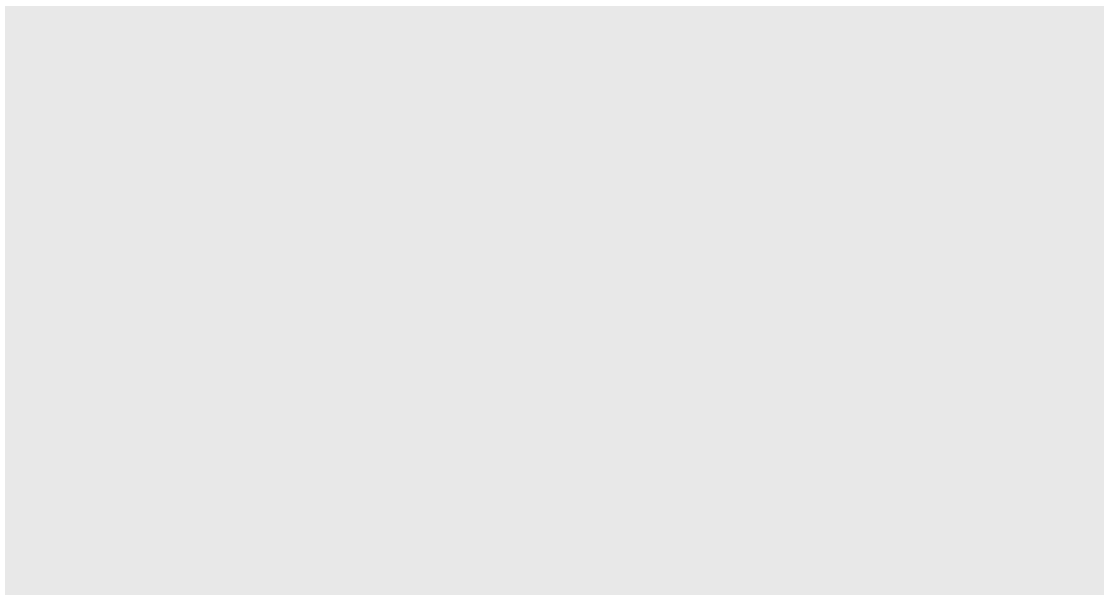
"Several youngsters consume tobacco that has dangerous health hazards. There is a need for vendors to place boards that convey the message that consuming tobacco is harmful to health so that youngsters will at least think twice before falling prey to it."

At one of the stalls on Cunningham Road, a vendor was selling Super Zerda, a tobacco product and there was no clear pictorial statutory warning on the sachets and the Minister directed officials to initiate action against the company.


And, the Health Minister collected six pan masala sachets and directed the officials to get them checked in laboratories to find whether they contained tobacco.

To a query, Mr. Khader said, "After the ban, sale of gutka has reduced significantly."

He added that similar drives against the sale of tobacco products would be carried out in all districts.



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