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Bihar govt bans gutkha, pan masala for 1 year

Banjot Kaur Bhatia / TNN / Updated: May 31, 2012, 11:35 IST

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PATNA: Taking a giant step in its war against tobacco products in the state, Bihar government on Wednesday banned the sale of tobacco and nicotine-mixed gutkha and pan masala and their variants for one year. A notification to this effect was issued on Wednesday afternoon. With this decision taken on the eve of 'World No-Tobacco Day', Bihar has become the third state after Madhya Pradesh and Kerala to ban these products. Speaking about it, health secretary cum commissioner, Sanjay Kumar said, "The manufacture, storage, sale and distribution of gutkha and pan masala containing tobacco or nicotine as ingredients have been prohibited for one year from the date of issue of order." It is based on the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India regulation no 2.3.4 to prohibit the addition of tobacco or nicotine in food, which was issued on August 1, 2011. "Those found violating the ban would be slapped fine up to Rs 3 lakh or imprisonment for one year," Kumar said, adding "It would be implemented by food safety officers and other designated officers. All district magistrates, superintendents of police and civil surgeons have been asked to take appropriate action to enforce the order. The designated teams will start conducting raids from Thursday."

Earlier in the day, addressing a gathering organized by Cancer Awareness Society (CAS), principal secretary, health, Amarjeet Sinha said the war against tobacco products in the state can't be fought successfully unless the community joins the state

Sinha said the war against tobacco products in the state can't be fought successfully unless the community joins the state government and civil society groups in its efforts. He said, "Polio could be eradicated only because people realized the gravity of situation and cooperated with the government. Similar is the case with tobacco control. Different sectors like health, education, home and transport need to work in tandem to prevent and cure tobacco cancer." Incidentally, according to a study of Global Adult Tobacco survey, 53.5% people of the state consume tobacco.

Stressing on tertiary care of cancer treatment, Sinha said that better facilities for cancer surgery would be made available at the Patna Medical College and Hospital, Mahavir Cancer Sansthan and Indira Gandhi Institute of Medical Sciences. He added that hospital chains like Fortis and Max have shown interest in opening their specialized cancer treatment centres in the city.

CAS national president T P Sinha said Bihar has become the first state to adopt multi-sectoral approach to tackle the problem of tobacco use. While the education department would see that tobacco is not sold in a radius of 100 yards from a school premises, the police would try to ensure that public places become free of tobacco, he said. Associate professor of radiotherapy in PMCH, Dr P N Pandit highlighted the point that approximately one-third of cancer is caused by tobacco consumption.

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