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## Kerala bans pan masala and its variants

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ROY MATHEW

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Kerala is the second state to ban gutka and pan products.

Kerala government has imposed a ban on manufacture, storage and sale of gutkha, panmasala and their variants containing tobacco and nicotine in the State.

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The ban was ordered under the Food Safety and Standards (Prohibition and Restriction on Sales) Regulation, 2011, treating gutkha, panmasala and their variants as food products, with immediate effect.

Announcing the ban at a press conference here, Chief Minister Oommen Chandy said that the Kerala had become the second State in the country after Madhya Pradesh to ban gutkha products.

The ban was decided upon as the products caused diseases such as cancer and addiction among youth. The ban was a long standing demand from parents and many others. The government would lose Rs 15 crore in tax revenue because of the ban. The tax had been raised from 20 to 22 per cent in current year's Budget.

The Chief Minister recalled that the government had banned sale of pan masala and gutkha products within 400 metres from educational institutions. Efforts to ban it across the State under the Prevention of Food Adulteration Act had not been successful.

Mr. Chandy said that he had written to the Prime Minister in July last year seeking a total ban on gutkha and pan masala across the country. However, the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare replied in April this year that the States had the jurisdiction to ban gutkha and pan masala under the Food Safety and Standards Regulation Act. The Health Department initiated steps immediately to ban them.

He said that officials would be designated in all districts to enforce the ban. Besides, the collectors would head squads to check sale or distribution of the tobacco products.

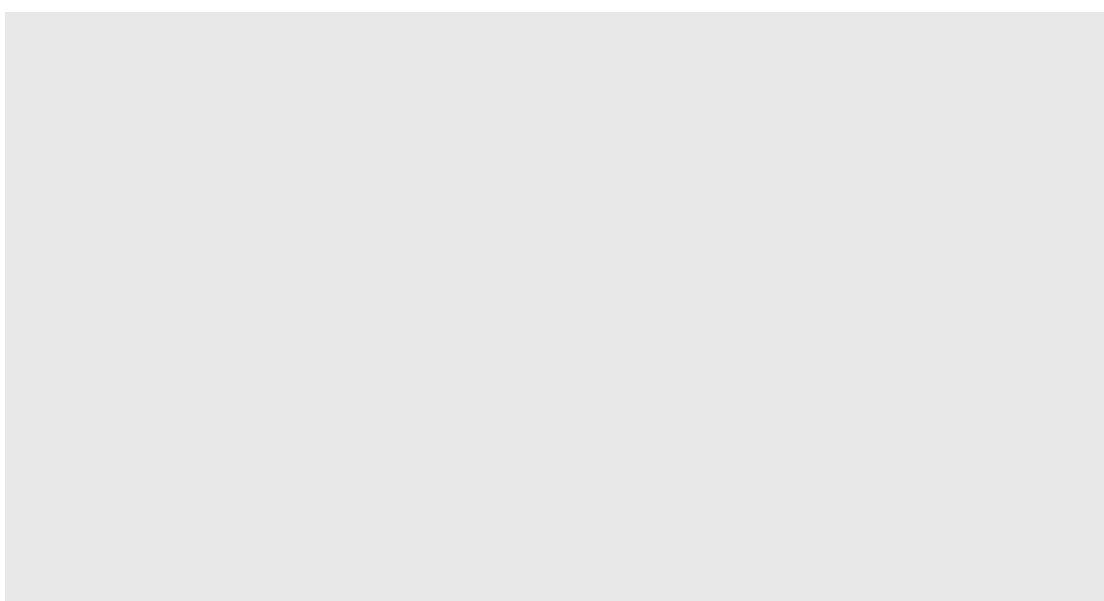
Health Minister V. S. Sivakumar, who was present in the press briefing, said that the Health Department would work with the

Education Department to ensure that the ban is strictly implemented and monitored with the help of threetier committees formed for monitoring sale of tobacco products around schools. Biju Prabhakar, Commissioner of Food Safety, was also present at the press conference.


Tobacco Free Kerala, a coalition of like-minded organisations in the area of anti-tobacco campaigns, was launched in December last with the Minister as chairman to support the government activities for checking use of tobacco. Paul Sebastian, Director, Regional Cancer Centre here, is its Vice Chairman. Widespread use of pan masala and Gutkha products had come to the notice of the government, especially among the youth.

Gutkha is a powdery, granular white smokeless product that contains arecanut, tobacco, nicotine, lime, spices, cardamom, catechu, colouring agents and pleasing flavouring odours. According to Global Adult Tobacco Survey 2009-10, 10.7 per cent of adults in Kerala use smokeless tobacco products such as gutkha and pan masala.

Studies have shown that gutkha is more addictive than ordinary chewing tobacco. It is highly carcinogenic as it contains both tobacco and arecanut. Gutkha use is strongly associated with the development of oral submucosal fibrosis, which causes difficulty in opening the mouth. Nearly two-third of patients with this condition develops cancer, an official release said.



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