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After the ban, gutka hits market in another form

DHNS

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The government might have enforced a ban on manufacture, storage and sale of gutka and other tobacco and nicotine products, with a good intention of protecting public health. But, a visit to paan shops reveal a trend that defeats the whole purpose and, reduces the legislation to paper.

Manufacturers have found an ingenious way to supply their clientele tobacco and paan masala (both not banned when sold individually) in separate sachets, which, when combined gives the same mixture as gutka.

The government order of the ban signed by Food Safety Commissioner V B Patil on May 30, says that manufacture, storage, sale or distribution of gutka and paan masala containing tobacco and nicotine as ingredients is prohibited in the State.

The ban is based on regulation 2,3, 4 of the Food Safety and Standards (Prohibition and Restrictions on Sale) Act, 2011, which prohibits the use of tobacco, nicotine or any other products injurious to health in food products.

Gutka and paan masala that till recently contained tobacco and nicotine are now being cleverly replaced by paan masala products sans tobacco and nicotine. This is being sold separately with tobacco products like zarda. A number of users are now complementing one with the other.

Sachets of such paan masala without any tobacco and nicotine along with sachets of zarda are gradually flowing into shops all over the City. It is in such a complementary form that gutka and paan masala are now being supplied separately to shops and demand is also high, said a supplier.

A number of shopkeepers to whom Deccan Herald spoke, claimed that while there was no sale of paan masala and gutka in the past few days, their respective suppliers have assured them of a fresh supply in the new complementary form soon.

One major gutka company in the country already has its product in the market in such a form. In Maharashtra, the ban on gutka and paan masala is wider in ambit and includes magnesium carbonate (carcinogenic substance) and any other substances that constitute gutka and paan masala.

In different states the order of the ban has been worded differently, and governments will have to be vigilant to any such market tactics that may require an amendment to the rule, said Dr Upendra Bhojani from the Institute of Public Health, Bangalore.

Since the ban came into force from June 1, a number of manufacturers in the state have suffered huge losses according to a gutka retailer in the City. Manufacturers here will be resorting to this kind of a production from July. In fact, it is nothing new and as it is going on all over the country.

The industry has to survive somehow or the other, he said. In Bihar, the sale of paan masala has been going on in such a complementary form despite the ban, Dr Bhojani said.

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