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Strict 'no' to tobacco advertisements in Kerala

Thiruvananthapuram, Oct 3 (IANS) Kerala Chief Minister Oommen Chandy Thursday said advertising of tobacco products would soon be banned in the state in keeping with Section 5 of the Indian Tobacco Control Act, 2003. Speaking to IANS, Chandy said he had not yet heard of the directive that was reportedly sent by the union health secretary to all chief secretaries in the states, seeking implementation of Section 5 of the Tobacco Control Act. 'If the directive has come, then no one need doubt that our government will take the necessary steps to see that the rule is implemented in letter and spirit,' Chandy said

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"If the directive has come, then no one need doubt that our government will take the necessary steps to see that the rule is implemented in letter and spirit," Chandy said.

A top government source told IANS that the union health secretary's directive to this effect had been received by the Kerala chief secretary.

Section 5 of the Tobacco Control Act restricts all forms of advertisement (direct, indirect/surrogate), promotion and sponsorship of tobacco products. Section 6 of the Act prohibits sale of tobacco products to those below 18 years of age.

"My government's policy is quite clear. We do not wish to do anything that will promote tobacco products . We have already banned pan masala (a chewing mixture often tobacco-laced) in the state. And now this directive will be implemented at the earliest," Chandy said.

Additional Director A.S. Pradeep Kumar of the state health services said children are most affected by tobacco products. More than 30 percent of children in Kerala suffer from respiratory diseases.

"Environmental tobacco smoke far exceeds the permissible levels in our state," said Kumar.

The state recently announced that shops selling cigarettes cannot give matchboxes or lighters to those looking to smoke up right there.

"After the rule came, I do not provide a matchbox or a lighter because the money I make selling cigarettes in a week will disappear with the fine, if I am caught," a shopkeeper in front of the state secretariat said.

A study conducted by the Achutha Menon Centre for Health Science Studies of the Sree Chitra Tirunal Institute for Medical Sciences and Technology here found that 59 percent of diabetes patients in the state were also tobacco users.

The study found that 43.5 percent of smokers did not drink alcohol, and were categorised as "exclusive smokers".

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meeting in Jaipur

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