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Tobacco products worth Rs.25 lakh seized from shops near schools

Raid conducted by district administration officials

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The district health administration officials seized tobacco products worth Rs.25 lakh from various shops around educational institutions in raids conducted in the district on Friday.

The raids were conducted by the officials as part of the SAFE Thiruvananthapuram initiative to ensure that no shops around educational institutions were selling tobacco products.

Officials had to seek the help of police in many places, as they encountered stiff resistance from the traders.

Officials inspected 1,092 shops in the district and some 200 products were seized, including several banned products like pan masala and gutka of various brands.

The district health administration said it had recommended to the Food Safety authorities that legal action be taken against five shops, which were found selling the banned pan masala and gutka products.

Action would also be taken against other shops under the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products (Prohibition of Advertisement and Regulation of Trade and Commerce, Production, Supply and Distribution) Act 2003 (COPTA).

Notice has already been issued to 189 traders. According to COPTA, no tobacco products should be displayed or sold in shops within 100 yards of any educational institution.

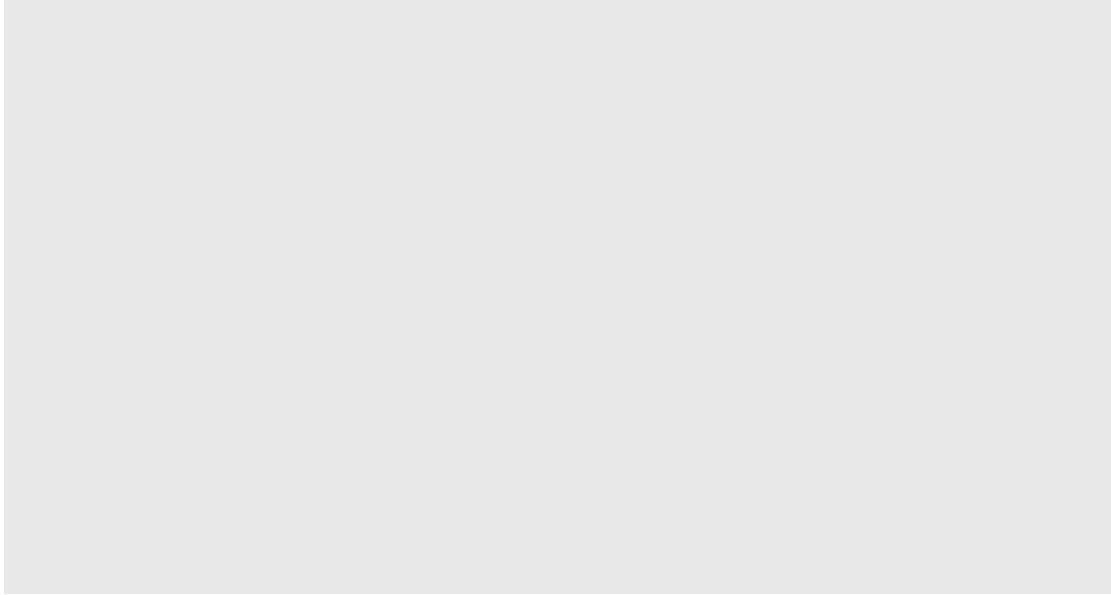
Even though the Kerala High Court had ordered in March 26 that the said provision under the Act be implemented strictly, there seemed to be widespread violation of rule, prompting officials to tighten the inspections.

Health officials said in similar raids conducted in the month of June, tobacco products worth Rs.10 lakh had been seized from various shops near schools.


The fact that tobacco products worth almost three times the amount was seized in Friday's raids indicated that there was scant regard for the law and that there was indeed an increased demand for tobacco products from the youth.

The raids were led by District Medical Officer, T. Peethambaran, district health officer (Rural), P.K. Raju, and various senior health officials and field officers.

The DMO has also issued a warning that violation of COPTA will invite strict legal action.



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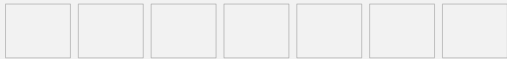
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