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# 'Parties unwilling to include tobacco control in manifestos'

Thiruvananthapuram, April 2 (IANS) Medico-legal experts here have cried foul over the absence of intent betrayed by political parties in their manifestos for the Lok Sabha polls, when it comes to tackling the perils of tobacco use. The irony, experts say, is that while the manifestos make bombastic promises such as focus on preventive rather than curative measures, health security for all and health for all families/habitations, no party has come forward to address the critical issue. 'A look at the poll manifestos of leading parties in the Lok Sabha elections from 2004 - the year in which India ratified the World Health Organisation's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) - shows that none of them has the political will to remedy this health malady,' said eminent oncologist M.

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"A look at the poll manifestos of leading parties in the Lok Sabha elections from 2004 - the year in which India ratified the World Health Organisation's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) - shows that none of them has the political will to remedy this health malady," said eminent oncologist M. Krishnan Nair.

Nair, who is also founder director of Regional Cancer Centre here, said tobacco causes one million deaths in India annually.

The rate of cancers caused by tobacco use is 40 percent in men and 15-20 percent among women, he said, pointing out that political parties have not taken up seriously this issue dealing with preventable public health.

He also exhorted political parties to sincerely consider inclusion of issues related to greater public good, such as tobacco control, and added that medical resources are already being severely stretched.

Nair said there is now one doctor serving 1,800 people as against the WHO guideline of one doctor for 1,600.

"There is a resource gap of approximately 1.4 million doctors and 2.8 million nurses. Hospital bed density in India is significantly short of WHO guidelines of 3.511 per 1,000 patients. Collective will is required to limit preventable tobacco-induced diseases and save our medical resources for more genuine needs," he added.

Justice (retd) D. Sreedevi, former chairperson of the Kerala Women's Commission, said tobacco use was not just a public health issue, but also a matter of social injustice.

"Macro-economic policy changes through measures such as higher tobacco taxes coupled with no-holds-barred implementation of Indian tobacco control law, COTPA, to protect youth from tobacco initiation are needed in earnest. This intent is not reflected in the poll manifestos of any political party," said the retired judge.

Veteran journalist Leela Menon said the media has rightly highlighted the harms caused by tobacco use and pointed out to the need for multiple efforts to bring down its use and resultant diseases

"It is interesting to note that in spite of the wide media pressure, none of the political parties has thought it fit to come out in open support of this cause," she said..

"Political parties do not seem interested in people's health or welfare. Instead, they are only interested in generating votes," said Menon.

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