

NATION

WHO Praises India for Tobacco Warnings



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Written by [Abantika Ghosh](#) | Abu Dhabi | Updated: March 19, 2015 8:04 am

The move mandating 85 per cent pictorial health warnings on tobacco product packages from April 1 has earned India praise from the WHO on the opening day of the 16th World Conference on Tobacco or Health.

“It is beautiful that India has notified the regulation. That is the biggest pictorial warning in the world. Whatever assistance India needs in that direction, we are willing to provide it to them,” said Dr Douglas Bettcher, director, WHO department for prevention of non-communicable diseases. The decision was notified in October last year and comes into effect next month.

WHO director general Margaret Chan described it as a move that showed “political will”. “We would urge and encourage India to notify the regulation announced last summer,” she said, expressing concerns over the emerging trend of big tobacco companies dragging governments to court for attempting to regulate tobacco products. Philip Morris International had dragged Uruguay to the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes when the country tried to introduce 80 per cent pictorial warnings on tobacco packets.

In India, also, lobbying to stall the implementation of the notification is afoot. The final notification alerting the industry is yet to be issued though it normally comes out a month in advance.

Earlier this month, Dilipkumar Gandhi, the BJP MP from Ahmednagar in Maharashtra, wrote to Union Health Minister J P Nadda saying that no country, except Thailand, has such stringent warning provisions. “Since the above issue is already under examination by the Committee on Subordinate Legislation, and secretary health was appeared before the committee on 4th February 2015. The matter is being examined regarding implementation of the new notification

w.e.f 1.4.2015 and its impact on the workers and manufacturers of bidi/cigarette and tobacco industry in India and its financial impact as a whole on the revenue, it will be in the fitness of things that the above notification implementation w.e.f 1.4.2015 is kept in abeyance,” Gandhi, chairman of the committee, wrote to Nadda on March 2.

The FICCI has also written to the Health Ministry questioning the decision to increase the size of pictorial warnings, arguing it would hurt the domestic cigarette industry and that a large number of non-cigarette tobacco products would escape the net.

However, pressing for the bigger warnings, a group of anti-tobacco activists led by NCP MP Supriya Sule met Nadda on Wednesday.

Though the WHO chose not to comment about the internal churnings in India on the pictorial warning, Dr Bettcher said: “Bidis and smokeless tobacco cannot have different levels of taxation. That is a disturbing trend in India and in many other countries.”

(The author is in Abu Dhabi on a fellowship of the National Press Foundation, Washington)