

Gujarat: Tobacco product retailers oppose proposed curbs



Tobacco retailers staged protests over various proposed restrictions

Fearing a loss of business and financial hit, an association of tobacco product retailers on Thursday came out to protest the proposed restrictions on the products that they can sell and controls on in-shop advertising.

The Gujarat chapter of Federation of Retailers Association of India held protests against introduction of restrictions on sale of other products by tobacco retailers, i.e. pan shops.

"We have learnt about plans to restrict tobacco retailers from selling products of everyday use such as bread, eggs, juices, soft drinks, wafers, etc. In our opinion, this is a restriction of free trade and will increase the cost of doing business. We appeal to the government to refrain from implementing such restrictions," Sudip Shah, member of the Federation's Gujarat chapter, told reporters.

The proposal to restrict tobacco shops from selling non-tobacco products was mooted by the health ministry last year with the idea that it would help in preventing children and non-users from getting exposure to tobacco products. However, the proposal is yet to take concrete shape.

Ram Singh, another member of the Federation, said the sale of non-tobacco products such as bakery items, cold drinks, chocolates, juices, among others, accounts for 60% of their sale, and tobacco products the remaining. "A move to stop us from selling non-tobacco products would lead to a big drop in our business and hurt us financially. We also fear harassment from authorities," he said. The pan shop owners are also opposing the proposed controls on in-shop advertising, which would bar them from displaying tobacco products in the shop. They said that such a move would remove the differentiation between retailers selling legal tobacco products and those selling smuggled or illicit tobacco items.

The Federation said there are around 2 lakh tobacco product retailers in the state, who would be affected by the proposed restrictions. The body alleged that the proposals were mooted under pressure from foreign-funded NGOs.

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