

No Decision Yet On Cigarette Ban Over Smoking-Covid Link: Maharashtra

Bombay High Court had previously suggested that the state government consider a temporary ban on the sale of cigarettes and beedis.

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Mumbai: The Maharashtra government on Tuesday told the Bombay High Court that it had not yet decided on taking any action against the production and sale of cigarettes and beedis over a possible link between smoking and COVID-19, and said it was not against manufacturers.

Advocate General Ashutosh Kumbhakoni, who appeared for the state government, told the High Court that following his previous submissions over a possible link between smoking and severity of the COVID-19 infection, several manufacturers had written to the state government denying the connection.

"Some of them (manufacturers) are thinking that the government is opposed to them. Some beedi manufacturers even held a protest yesterday," Mr Kumbhakoni said, clarifying that the state government is not against any manufacturer of cigarettes and beedis.

On June 16, Mr Kumbhakoni had cited research papers of the Union government's Tata Memorial Centre that claimed that there existed a possible "positive correlation between smoking and COVID severity".

The Advocate General had at the time said that a majority of the studies that the experts at Tata Memorial had referred to, stated that smokers were more vulnerable to the infection and also that severity of the disease was higher in cases of people who smoked cigarettes.

Only three of the several reports that the Centre had referred to had given a contrary opinion, he had said.

Mr Kumbhakoni had been responding to the court's query on whether cigarette smokers were more likely to contract coronavirus.

The High Court had previously suggested that the state government consider a temporary ban on the sale of cigarettes and beedis.

On Tuesday, Mr Kumbhakoni said, "They (manufacturers) are worried that a blanket order may be passed restraining sale of tobacco and beedis. So, I just want to clarify, this is not what the state is contemplating at this stage."

The bench was then informed that a body of tobacco manufacturers and retailers, the Bidi Tambaku Vyapari Sangh, had also filed an intervention application seeking to be included as a party in the hearing. The court allowed the intervention application, and it will continue hearing the matter on July 1.

(Except for the headline, this story has not been edited by NDTV staff and is published from a syndicated feed.)

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