

Mizoram: Chinese cigarettes stymie tobacco control drive

Sumir Karmakar, DH News Service, Aizawl, Dec 04 2018

"More harmful" and cheap Chinese cigarettes, pumped in through Myanmar borders, are available in every nook and corner of Aizawl, making Mizoram's target to reduce tobacco use tougher.

Size is the same, packaging is equally attractive but the price is half that of Indian ones. This has become a serious challenge to both government as well as NGOs as the state with just 11 lakh population has maximum cancer cases, mainly due to rampant tobacco use.

"Strong enforcement of the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act (COPTA) has helped us reduce tobacco use among adults from 67.2% in 2009-10 to 58.7% in 2016-17 but the easy availability of foreign cigarettes, mainly those made in China, has made our job tougher. They are priced less and so lower income groups are switching over to the foreign ones as prices of our tobacco products have been increased over the past few years with an aim to reduce tobacco use and check cancer cases," Jane Ralte, state nodal officer of Mizoram Tobacco Control Cell, told DH, at Aizawl civil hospital.

The hospital, where a tobacco cessation clinic was opened by the cell in 2005, now receives at least 10 to 13 people daily, who are suffering from tobacco - related ailments and are willing to give up tobacco.

"Even 13-14-year-old boys and girls, who use tobacco are also seeking our help now," said Lalruatsangi, a psychologist at the clinic.

With nearly 1,400 new cancer cases and nearly 700 deaths reported every year, Mizoram continues to top states in highest cancer cases in the country. Jeremy L Pautu, head of medical oncology department in the state's only cancer hospital said lung cancer was common among women due to rampant smoking.

"Chinese tobacco makers are so smart that they have now started packaging the tobacco products with 80% pictorial health warnings after we started seizing their products under COPTA. So we have requested the Central government several times since 2014 to withdraw tobacco products from the list of products permitted for import under the Indo-Myanmar trade agreement of 1995," Ralte said.

Tobacco products enter Mizoram from Myanmar and Bangladesh, both sharing borders with the northeastern state. "Government of India's bid to discourage tobacco use by raising its price has gone up in smoke as cheap foreign cigarettes are flooding the markets," said a Mizoram health department's letter to the union ministry of commerce.

Mizoram, meanwhile, continue to wait for the ministry's action in this regard.

Source: <https://www.deccanherald.com/national/cheap-chinese-cigarettes-706439.html>



Chinese cigarettes. (Photo credit: Mizoram Tobacco Control Cell)