

10K Ganesh mandals pledge to stub out tobacco advertisements

Sumitra Deb Roy | TNN

Mumbai: The war against tobacco is all set to get more teeth with 10,000 Ganesh mandals in the city pledging to refrain from advertising tobacco products during the 11-day festival. The success of the pledge, though, remains to be seen as mandals collectively stand to lose over Rs 50 lakh as tobacco companies are their major sponsors.

If the mandals stick to their pledge, one would not get to see any tobacco-related advertisements, even surrogate ones, in the pandals this year. "We have already appealed to all mandals that advertisements related to gutkha, cigarettes or other tobacco products should be totally banned," said Naresh Dahibawkar, president of Sarvajanic Ganpati Mandal Samanvay Samiti. He added that the mandals have shown keenness to help the Smoke Free Mumbai campaign that aims to eradicate smoking in public areas.

Dahibawkar, however, admitted that the losses for mandals could be up to 10-15% as tobacco companies provide the lion's share of advertisements. "Mostly bigger mandals get the advertisements. We are expecting them to forgo some prof-

700 BEST buses display pan masala ads: RTI

Mumbai: An RTI plea has revealed that over 700 BEST buses carry advertisements of tobacco products such as pan masalas. Dr Ravikant Shah, who sought the RTI information, feels that BEST advertising could have a bad effect on youngsters. "If 700 buses carry these ads, it is anybody's guess how many people see them every day."

O P Gupta, BEST general manager, said: "As BEST has given out three-year contracts to private agencies, we don't know the details of ads. But only legally permissible ads are carried."

Dr Surendra Shastri, chairperson of the Smoke-Free Mumbai Campaign, said: "They can be classified as surrogate ads and though the Tobacco Control Act, 2003, has provisions to ban them, the concerned provision has not yet been notified by the Centre."

it for the social cause," he added. Surrogate advertisements though remain a concern as many tobacco firms put up ban-

ners naming products other than tobacco. "We don't know how to tackle that."

The Mandal Samiti is also planning penalise those who flout the no-tobacco pledge. "Besides no ads, we are also serious about not allowing any tobacco consumption in and around 500 metres of the pandal," said Dahibawkar. "We are planning to initiate action against mandals flouting the rules with the BMC's help."

Under the campaign, mandals will also be judged according to their efforts to spread anti-tobacco awareness during the festival.

A survey by the Action Council against Tobacco-India has found a significant increase in awareness levels in restaurants and hotels after their staffers were informed about the laws. An earlier survey had found that before awareness campaigns were initiated, just about 12% of managers and 18% of clientele were aware of the smoke ban law. Things changed after awareness and enforcement campaigns as was found out by a fresh survey initiated between May and July 2010 in 100 south and central Mumbai restaurants. Now, about 96% are displaying signage. And, awareness in managers has gone up to 91%.