

# Plc warning: MoS trashes tobacco plan

Kounteya Sinha | TNN

New Delhi: MoS for health Dinesh Trivedi seems to be on a collision course with his senior Cabinet colleague and Union health minister Ghu-lam Nabi Azad as he has trashed a major ministry policy on tobacco.

Addressing the second national conference on tobacco and health in Mumbai, Trivedi said he does not believe in the merit of pictorial warnings on tobacco packets, and advocated replacing them with a slogan — "*tambaku maul ka saman hei*".

His comments come at a time when the warnings are being considered as a major public health intervention to reduce use of tobacco, which kills 2,200 people daily across the country.

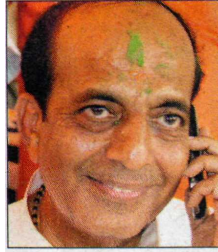
Azad, however, has been all praise for pictorial warnings.

In fact, he had recently said he hoped pictorial warnings would be visible and have a first-hand impact on smokers. The minister also urged that at least 40% of the pack should carry the warnings instead of present 30%.

"We will implement it seriously," Azad had said, adding: "It is a matter of great satisfaction that one of the important items that is mandatory under Section-7 of the Tobacco Control Act 2003, which provides for mandatory depiction of pictorial health warnings on all tobacco packs, is being implemented in India."

Activists are also shocked by Trivedi's comments.

Dr P C Gupta, director of Healis-Sekhsaria Institute for Public Health, who was present during Trivedi's speech, told TOI that "pictorial warnings help tremendously in combating tobacco use has been scientifically proven. We are disappointed by Mr Trivedi's comments and this shows



MoS for health Dinesh Trivedi

the need to work on our own policymakers, educating them on the ills of tobacco use. Such gory warnings inform people and encourage them to quit. They are also very successful in stopping youngsters from smoking."

Plans are afoot to introduce a second round of pictorial warnings from December 1. Pictorial warnings were enforced on May 31, 2009, following the Supreme Court's intervention. As per the rules, the pictorial warnings should be rotated every 12 months.

Gory pictorial warnings are used in several countries including Australia, Belgium, Chile and Hong Kong to deter people from smoking. Brazil changes the pictures every five months.

Presently, 9 lakh people die annually in India due to tobacco-related diseases.

Around 250 million people use tobacco products like gutkha, cigarettes and bidis in the country. Of them, over 16% are cigarette smokers and 44% smoke bidis.

The health ministry estimates that 40% of India's health problems stem from tobacco use. By 2020, tobacco will be responsible for 13% of all deaths in India. More than 38.4 million bidi smokers and 13.2 million cigarette smokers face premature death due to smoking.