

By Savita Verma
in New Delhi

PAKISTAN has implemented strong pictorial warnings on tobacco products to discourage smoking and consumption of tobacco even as India dillydallies over the matter.

Cigarette packets in Pakistan now have pictorial warnings depicting health disaster caused by tobacco consumption — mouth cancer. The warnings came into force on August 30.

"Pakistan kept its commitment to protect and safeguard the lives of its citizens and cut the huge toll following tobacco use. It has shown that firm and decisive steps can be taken by a proactive government that sincerely wants to rid its country of the bane of tobacco use." Bhavna B. Mukhopadhyay from Voluntary Health Foundation of India said.

The new warnings show a mouth cancer patient on the top panel and cover 40 per cent of the front and back of a cigarette packet. Of this space, 30 per cent is covered by the picture and 10 per cent by the accompanying advisory.

Gradually, the area covered by the pictorial warning will be raised to 50 per cent of the packet space as recommended

Pak beats India to graphic warnings



(Left) A cigarette packet in Pakistan depicts an image of an oral cancer patient; Two Indian packs with a tame warning.

by the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, an international treaty signed and ratified by Pakistan in 2004.

"Not only has the Pakistan government's ministry of health ensured stronger and more hard-hitting pictorial warnings, it has also clearly stated that size, colour and all other specifications are to be compliant with The Cigarette

(Printing of Warning) Rules 2009," Mukhopadhyay said.

In contrast, India was able to implement pictorial warnings after a long delay, following consistent advocacy efforts by civil society and public health activists and the Supreme Court's intervention on May 31, 2009. However, the pictures so far being printed as warnings are not strong enough to evoke

fear of tobacco among users.

A study by Healis-Sekhsaria Institute for Public Health has shown that the current pictorial warnings are ineffective.

The pictorial warnings were proposed in July 2006 under the Cigarette and Other Tobacco Products Act, 2003. The proposal then was to print warnings in the form of pictures of skull and bones, real-life pictures of cancer patients, corpses, a child dying because of the effects of smoking and mouth cancer lacerations.

After a year of implementation of the mild warnings, the Centre has decided to implement a second set of pictorial warnings depicting mouth cancer. These were to come into force from June 1, but have been deferred till December 1.

"It is to be seen if the government will meet the December 1 deadline or buckle again in the face of industry tactics," Mukhopadhyay said.