

## **Bidi, gutkha companies violating SC order on pictorial warnings**

**New Delhi, Jul 19 : Voluntary Health Association of India (VHAI), a voluntary organisation in the forefront of promoting public health, has alleged that 'Gutkha' and 'Bidi' companies were frequently violating the Supreme Court order which makes it mandatory to display pictorial warnings on 40 per cent of the total area of the packet regarding the harmful effects of these products.**

According to a statement, the VHAI, which has recently undertaken a study to monitor the implementation of the pack warning rules on tobacco products, most bidi brands were not carrying the pack warnings, even six weeks after the implementation of the law.

In fact, gutkha companies which have printed pictorial warnings on their brands have minimised the size of the health messages in violation of the government's notification to implement the new packaging and labeling rules which came into effect on May 31.

However, a few cigarette companies and brands have implemented the warnings.

The gutkha brand which is most near to the guidelines is Pan Parag with 35 per cent warning coverage on the pack.

On the other hand, Kuber Khaini carries 19 per cent and Rajdarbar 15 per cent, Shikhar Gutkha 10 per cent, Bahar Gutkha 18 per cent, and Rajshree Gutkha 14 per cent approximately.

The cigarette brands which have implemented the warnings are Red & White Flake, Four Square Premier, Wills Flake Filter and Marlboro. In some cases the warning has been displayed in one language only against the packaging and labeling rules which mandates that such warnings must be printed in English and the language in which the brand name of the product has been written.

Shikhar Gutkha has displayed the warning in one language while Dilbag Gutkha also has a written warning in one language.

Bhavna B Mukhopadhyay, Senior Director, VHAI said, "Tobacco companies are not implementing the Supreme Court order and the government's notification in the right spirit. As a matter of fact, they are in gross violation of specifications that have been clearly communicated to all manufacturers." Most unfortunate fact is this that even on passing of six weeks after the implementation date, most bidi

brands are yet to introduce the new packets.

"Strong enforcement drive should be initiated by the Government in order to prevent further dilution of packaging and labeling rules," he said.

As per the undertaking given by the Central Government in the Supreme Court on 6 May 2009, it is very clear that the law makes it compulsory for all packages of tobacco products to display pictorial warnings on 40 per cent of the total area on one side of the packets.

--- UNI