

The ban has not gone up in smoke, after all

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Sumitra Deb Roy

You might still see people smoking at public places but the smoking ban has added to the government kitty through fines.

Food and Drug Administration (FDA) statistics show the money collected was highest among all the states ever since the ban was implemented on October 2, 2008. And till November last year, Rs5,79,925 had

been collected through fines. "The ban was introduced in 2004 and we did our best to fine offenders even then," Mohan Patankar, the FDA joint commissioner, said. "Between 2004-08 (July) we collected only Rs2,55,000 but in four months (Aug-Nov 08) we collected Rs5,79,925."

"Due to increased awareness and support from policemen, we have noticed a significant drop in public smoking," Patankar said. Even ho-

tels and restaurants have been strictly following the ban. "Easy availability of challans and receipts has helped." He said 250 FDA officials

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and several policemen have been collecting fines in the city

Smoking in public places was banned since 2004 but implementing the ban was difficult because of lim-

ited public knowledge. The central government reinforced the ban on October 2 last year. "The fines are crucial in the attitudinal transformation among general public," Dr PC Gupta, director, Healis Sekhsaria Institute for Public Research, said. A government official said the Centre seemed unhappy with the performance. "Other states have only put up banners and posters while Maharashtra has implemented it and

earned so much in fines," he said.

Vincent Nazareth, the chairman of Crusade Against Tobacco, said most government offices in Delhi were yet to implement the ban. "I found people smoking in government offices, including the office of the health minister," he said. "The officers did not have challan books with them. Though money was collected through fines, no challans were given."