

# Minister asks why hookah parlours still open, BMC vows to enforce ban

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MARCH 9

**E**IGHT months after the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation banned hookah bars, the matter of enforcing them cropped up again on Monday, at the 14th World Conference on Tobacco or Health.

Union Health Minister Anbumani Ramadoss, answering a query, said hookah parlours were illegal and those running should be closed down.

After the BMC ban, 30 hookah hubs in the city had been shut down because of action from the civic body, but 26 still manage to function. Answering a query on hookah parlours openly violating the ban, Ramadoss said, "Hookah parlours in any form are illegal and should be banned. According to the law, hookah bars are banned, along with cigarettes. Why are they still open? We will help the BMC to shut down all the hookah parlours."

As per estimates from the BMC's health department, there were 59 hookah bars in



the city of which three were shut down when mayor Shubha Raul started her drive. "Out of the 56 remaining 30 were shut down following BMC action. But 26 are still operational and the civic body has informed the Mumbai police to take action on them," said Dr K I Har-sora, deputy executive health officer, BMC.

Although restaurants and food joints have to set up a separate smoking enclosure, they are not permitted to serve food in that area. However, there are many eateries in the city that continue to vi-

olate this rule.

Dr Prakash Gupta, Director, Healis Sekhsaria Institute for Public Health, and president of the 14th WCTOH, said, "The law clearly states that there should be an enclosed room where there should be no food and beverage servings."

After a campaign started by Raul, the civic administration in July last announced that hookahs would not be allowed in restaurants and eateries as it violated licensing conditions. The BMC had also decided that no permission would be given for

sale of hookah or allowing its use in restaurants. ■ The civic squad headed by the health department issued notices and took action on the other bars. In an affidavit in the Bombay High Court, the BMC had said that high doses of nicotine could result in disability or death.

Asked about Ramadoss's statement Raul said she hopes more cities will come out against this issue. "Tobacco consumption amongst the youth through hookah is high and therefore we began the anti-tobacco, anti-hookah drive. Almost all the hookah

parlours in the city start out as eating joints. We had revoked the licence of about 80 per cent of hookah parlours in the city. They have now gone back to being eateries once again," she said.

An Indian Institute of Environmental Medicine team visited restaurants, pubs, and hookah parlours both before and after the ban and found that in three hookah parlours surveyed there was actually an increase in particulate matter — from 965.7 micrograms per cubic metre to 1,498 micrograms per cu. m. (Inputs: Dhanya Nair)