

"Pictorial warnings on tobacco products soon"

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Staff Reporter

MUMBAI: The 14th World Conference on Tobacco or Health (WCOH) was inaugurated by Maharashtra Governor S.C. Jamir at the National Centre for the Performing Arts on Sunday.

Union Health and Family Welfare Minister 'Anbumani Ramadoss, who addressed the gathering said that despite the efforts of the government and many non-governmental organisations, implementation of World Health Organisation's (WHO)

Framework Convention Alliance for Tobacco Control, which India has ratified, has been delayed due to political and non-political pressures. "Hopefully by 31st May, we will have pictorial warnings on all tobacco products," Dr. Ramadoss said.

He enumerated the various decisions taken by the Indian



Anbumani Ramadoss

government to tackle the 'tobacco menace' and added that the issue was all the more important in the country because a large of its population was young and under the radar of tobacco companies. "In India, 57 per cent of men and just over 10 per cent women in the age group 15 to 49 use tobacco in some form or the other."

Margaret Chan, Director-General (WHO), joined the conference through a pre-recorded keynote address, emphasised the need to create awareness to ensure that the 'money making' tobacco industry did not take more innocent lives.

"This conference is going to provide an opportunity to a diverse assemblage of educators, policy makers, civil society members and scientists from all over the world to interact with each other. It will surely go a long way in advancing tobacco control in developing countries and providing a global perspective on tobacco control issues," Dr. Chan said.

Prakash C. Gupta, President of the 14th WCOH said: "The conference will give everyone an opportunity to focus on the complex tobacco problem in the country, which has the largest spectrum of tobac-

co products — from industrial ones like gutkha to custom-made products like betel quid."

Dr. Gupta added: "So far, most of the focus was on Western countries but the business has decreased in industrialised countries and the big tobacco companies are already targeting developing countries for expansion."

Maharashtra Home Minister Jayanrth Patil thanked the delegates for coming from all over the globe to participate in the conference.

The theme for this year's conference is 'Global Tobacco Control: Multi Sectoral Approach to Tobacco Control-Policies, Pathways, Partners and People.'

The five-day conference will witness more than 600 participants, 250 international speakers and 2,000 delegates from over 130 countries.