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Title: Need to strictly implement the existing laws banning the sale of tobacco products to minors and smoking in public.

DR. SHASHI THAROOR (THIRUVANANTHAPURAM): Smoking kills over one million Indians annually and is the fourth leading cause of non-communicable diseases, accounting for 53% of all deaths in India. The Health Ministry estimates that the total economic cost from tobacco use in 2011 amounted to Rs 1,04,500 crore, equivalent to 1.04 per cent of our GDP. This, ironically, is greater than the revenue generated from the overall sale of tobacco. Despite its longstanding illegality, millions of children are addicted to tobacco and serve as lucrative customers to the tobacco industry. A million others die due to passive smoking alone.

These are shocking numbers and I urge this government to not only strictly implement existing laws banning the sale of tobacco products to minors and smoking in public, but also to improve to proactive levels our efforts to spread awareness on the subject to prevent both the young and old from falling prey to tobacco addiction. Making tobacco products unaffordable has been a deterrent to a considerable degree, but the sale of loose cigarettes means that it is easy to circumvent the law. I urge this government, therefore, to also place an immediate ban on the sale of loose cigarettes. Furthermore, beer is, which many Indians smoke, are not taxed in the same category as cigarettes nor do they carry pictorial warnings on their boxes. For the health of our citizens, beedis must also be brought within the same regime.

I also call upon the government to look into utilising revenue generation from the sale of tobacco products to provide alternative sources of employment to beedi workers as well as towards the treatment of those who suffer from smoking related diseases such as cancer.