

Selling mouth cancer for Rs3

Sale of gutka continues unabated despite ban in Sindh

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Even though sale of gutka is banned in Sindh, the blood-brown stains on the roads and walls of Sukkur city say otherwise.

When the ban, recommended by health authorities because chewing gutka regularly is a major cause of mouth and throat cancer, was first put in place, the police did stir. A few raids were carried out against sellers, kiosk owners were issued warnings - but then gradual things settled down.

You can still buy a wide variety of gutka from a wider variety of shops. Some of the more

creative gutka brands include Bombay, one-2-one, 2100, JM, doctor and Pan Parag, and almost all are priced between Rs3 to Rs8.

According to a survey by *The Express Tribune*, many gutka suppliers in Sukkur are wholesalers. They almost always have a general store and dealing in gutka is just a lucrative side-business for them. Several of the wholesalers in the market at Nishter Road are involved. A hundred sachets of Pan Parag are sold at Rs260. The rate applies for all retailers and concessions are hard to come by. Many of the buyers come from the outskirts of Sukkur and nearby cities and towns.

A shopkeeper, who had come from Pannu Aqil, was purchasing general store items such as soaps, toothpastes, shampoos

PRICE

260

rupees is the cost for 100 sachets of Pan Parag in the wholesale market at Nishter Road

and deodorants along with a large quantity of Pan Parag. He said that he runs a general store in Pannu Aqil, where he also sells gutka. A lot of people consume gutka in the rural areas, he informed, adding that he earns more than 100 per cent profit on its sale.

Dr Lutufullah Dharejo, the in-charge at a food laboratory in Rohri, told *The Express Tribune*

that gutka does not contain anything edible. Its ingredients consist of betel nut, calcium lime, tobacco and katha. Gutka discolours teeth and its prolonged use causes permanent damage to teeth, Dr Dharejo explained. It also damages the digestive and nervous system. A combination of betel nut and tobacco could cause throat infections, which in the long run can turn into throat cancer.

DPO Sukkur confirmed that gutka was being bought and sold all over the city. He also admitted that the police were quite lax when it came to implementing the ban. "It is due to their slackness that the sale of gutka has gone up so much," he said. However, he promised to direct the officials to take 'strict action' against shopkeepers involved.