

Businesses and industry must come together and partner with the government to become a greater force in fighting this growing threat

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New Delhi,

Dr. Harsh Vardhan, Union Minister of Health and Family welfare today inaugurated the 7th Edition of "MASCRAGE 2021"- Movement against Smuggled & Counterfeit Trade organised by FICCI Cascade.

In his address, the Union Health Minister expressed pleasure that the 7th edition of MASCRAGE will deliberate and discuss actionable, innovative policy solutions that can reverse the rising tide of counterfeit, smuggled and spurious products.

He emphasized the challenges of COVID 19 pandemic and illegal operator of drugs and stated, "As we are all aware, amid the chaos created by the Covid-19 pandemic and the various policy responses designed to contain its spread, illicit players have used the pandemic as an opportunity to increase their nefarious activities, causing significant damage to the economy of the nation, health and safety of people worldwide."

Dr Harsh Vardhan added, "The aim of MASCRAGE 2021 is to foster a healthy discussion on newer and practical strategies to mitigate the challenges of counterfeiting and smuggling especially in a post COVID era. Chief among them should be a focus on generating awareness. The COVID 19 pandemic has placed unprecedented demands on our health system. Health care providers are reinventing existing delivery models to bring healthcare closer to the patient."

Applauding the efforts taken by Govt. to check menace of spurious drugs, "Government of India has taken various measures to check menace of spurious drugs. The Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 was amended under Drugs & Cosmetics Amendment Act 2008. Under this Act, if any drug is deemed to be adulterated or spurious, then the offender or liable person may face imprisonment for a term which shall not be less than ten years but which may extend to imprisonment for life. Special Courts for trial of offences under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act for speedy disposal have been established. With well-developed legal framework

and significant education efforts, the government has taken steps to protect consumers' health and safety from dangerous counterfeiting and smuggling."

Dr. Harsh Vardhan also called for greater focus on coming together to address the growing hazards of counterfeiting and smuggling. In this regard, he said, "Businesses and industry must come together and partner with the government to become a greater force in fighting this growing threat with the ultimate goal of keeping consumers safe. The methods by which spurious, misbranded and adulterated drugs enter the distribution channel have become increasingly complex. Weak points in the distribution processes of pharmaceutical products provide an avenue for entry of such products in the supply chain. This is an issue where industry players can and must play an active role to help identify and plug these loopholes," he said.

Restating the clarion call for 'Vocal for Local' by Hon'ble Prime Minister Sh Narendra Modi, he said, "The call for an Aatma Nirbhar Bharat and Vocal for Local could indeed provide solutions to a host of challenges that lie ahead of us. As India starts to produce strong domestic brands and gradually reduces its dependence on foreign products, avenues for profiteering by smugglers and counterfeiters will sooner become limited. Law enforcement will also become more effective in identifying & prosecuting producers of spurious goods. Therefore 'Vocal for Local' will be an extremely potent tool in our fight against illicit trade."

Highlighting the areas that need attention, Dr Harsh Vardhan said, "Reviewing current regulations related to smuggling, counterfeiting and piracy, using latest technology to aid security forces and enforcement agencies, raising the penalties for those committing this crime and allocation of more financial and human resources to counter this activity are some areas where adequate thrust can be given."

The Union Health Minister applauded the efforts of FICCI MASCRAGE and said, "I greatly appreciate FICCI MASCRAGE for recognizing the work of the law enforcement agencies and felicitating the best performing officers each year for their outstanding achievement in the prevention of counterfeiting and smuggling, and enforcement of anti-smuggling and anti-counterfeiting laws."

Justice Retd. Sh Manmohan Sarin, Hon'ble Former Chief Justice, High Court of J&K, Mr Kunio Mikuriya Secretary General, World Customs Organisation, Sh Uday Shankar President, FICCI and others were present at the event.

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