

# News analysis

## UK: video nasty for BAT

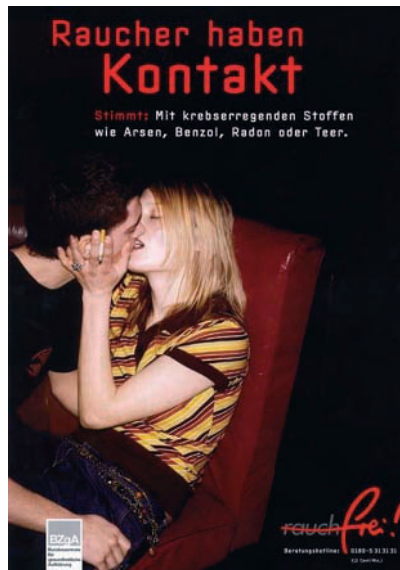
It is always reassuring when a tobacco company's PR stunt goes wrong, especially when it is panned by someone who is supposed to be basking in the warmth of its corporate generosity. A recent case of biting the hand that feeds you was seen at the Old Warehouse gallery in London a couple of months ago. The brown stained hand holding the money belonged to British American Tobacco (BAT), which despite new restrictions on tobacco sponsorship of sports and cultural events apparently sponsored an exhibition of new artists, aptly named "We love to kill what we love".

The ungrateful beneficiary was a young artist called Simon Tyszko. He was so appalled at the apparently covert involvement of the tobacco company that he interspersed his video installation with some very down to earth anti-tobacco messages, revealing BAT's involvement and what he thought about it to all who saw his work. BAT hastily withdrew. It must be a nasty shock for a company like BAT, when a gifted person with talent that it wants to exploit for its own cynical ends turns out also to have a conscience and a brain.



BAT recently sponsored an aptly named exhibition of new artists in London.

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One of a series of health ministry advertisements appearing in youth publications in Germany, supposedly to discourage teens from smoking, which is being funded by the tobacco industry.

## Germany: still sleeping with the enemy

The determination of the German government to ignore growing anger about its close proximity to the tobacco industry, and appeals for it to end the deal whereby the industry funds a youth education programme, reached new heights in August. As more than two thousand tobacco control advocates from all over the world convened in Helsinki for the World Conference on Tobacco or Health, a new advertising campaign was launched in Germany, consisting of a series of advertisements in youth publications. Each ad showed teenagers in some very modern, life-like teen situations, under what appeared to be an aggressively pro-tobacco message. Underneath the main message, in much smaller type, was another item of copy refuting the apparent message of the first one.

For example, one showing a young girl, cigarette in hand, mid-kiss with her boyfriend, was entitled, "Raucher haben kontakt" ("Smokers have contact"); and below that, in the smaller type, some more copy that translates as, "Correct: with carcinogens such as arsenic, benzene, radon or tar". The ads are part of a contract valued at €11.8 million (US\$13.5 million) over

five years between the German Ministry of Health and the tobacco industry. Significantly, the contract specifies that the money can only be spent on youth prevention campaigns, and that "the measures taken must not discriminate against the tobacco industry, their products, the cigarette business or the adult smoker".

The Federal Centre for Health Education, which developed the campaign, pleaded that the new ads had pre-tested well with a representative sample of the target audience, and had not been influenced in any way by the tobacco industry, just funded by it. However, some of the world's most experienced health educationalists, who saw the ads in Helsinki, added their derision to the gathering storm of protest from an increasingly cohesive coalition of German health groups. They saw the ads as crass beyond belief, refusing to believe that even if teenagers read the smaller copy, it would actually have any effect on their attitudes to smoking. Many groups feared it would confuse teenagers and even encourage them to smoke, as the prevailing messages were all in the images—of young people doing things they like to do, accompanied by cigarettes. The overall impact of the ads was to glamorise smoking, they claimed, and it was shameful for the German government to be taken in by the tobacco industry's pretence that it does not want young people to start smoking.

Professor Dr Friedrich Wiebel, chairman of the German medical action group on smoking and health, went further: "The seduction is perfect. The minor shot of health warnings makes smoking even more attractive." Groups such as the cancer charity German Cancer Aid demanded that the health ministry should immediately end the campaign, while the world conference delegates unanimously voted for a resolution urging civil society, academia, and governments not to accept funding or participate in the tobacco industry's youth, social responsibility, voluntary marketing, or other programmes.

At the end of the conference, one apologist for the advertisements was heard to plead that at least the health education centre was in dialogue with the government about tobacco, whereas other health groups had abandoned their attempts to persuade it to change its policy. This left the tobacco industry as the only other body willing to talk to

it, and thus able to influence government policy. The logic of what sounded like a policy of appeasement was not well received by those who heard it.

Apart from its tobacco control policy, or lack of it, Germany is in many ways a model European country that deserves to be celebrated for its contribution to the present, not the past. If only the government could break its disastrous addiction to Big Tobacco (see also *Tobacco Control* 2002;11:291–3).

## Finland: floating loopholes

Delegates to the world conference on tobacco in Helsinki were reminded throughout the meeting what a strong leadership role Finland has played in tobacco control. On the way to achieving one of the world's fastest declines in lung cancer mortality among middle aged men, it was one of the first countries to ban all forms of tobacco promotion.

But admiring visitors did not have to go far to be reminded that wherever there is the slightest loophole, the slime of tobacco advertising will ooze out. One delegate took a post-conference trip across the Baltic Sea to Stockholm, noting with satisfaction that Silja Line, the company operating the ferry, had received an award in the government backed "Golden Fork" scheme.

This is described as promoting non-smoking in hotels and restaurants, and is carried out "face to face" by the means of health education, and is a national quality project. Silja's own website proclaims that taking responsibility for the environment is an integral

aspect of its total quality management system. Not quite total enough, as the ship was full of multiple display racks of all varieties of tobacco, some just above child's eye height confectionery displays, as well as large, back-illuminated tobacco ads that dominated the duty free shop.

Silja says it strives to earn the respect of its customers and the general public by making a pioneering contribution in the sphere of environmental protection. In future, it may care to consider that the environment starts with its customers, and especially with their children.

## Australia: reviewing the act, industry-style

It has long been accepted that every decent health improvement plan, from the humblest local education campaign right up to a comprehensive national tobacco control act, should end with a section on the need for constant monitoring and evaluation, followed up by adjustments to the policy if necessary. Few governments that survive the countless rounds in the heavyweight ring of anti-tobacco legislation seem to remember the bit about review, but not surprisingly, Australia is once again a model.

After just 10 years, the federal government is reviewing its Tobacco Prohibition Act. It might have been thought that tobacco companies, which are known to have more or less given up any idea of increasing business in Australia, might have the grace to keep quiet. But no—they may be dead, but they just won't lie down. For years they protested that their products were harmless; then less harmful than the doctors said; then, well, harmful, but isn't everything else? And now a variation on an old line: everyone knows it all anyway.

Mr John Galligan, director of corporate affairs for BAT (Australia), commenting recently on the government's review plans, said: "We would contend there is universal understanding of the risks of smoking. Government surveys show there is a 98 per cent understanding. How much more do you burden the industry to communicate something the public is already aware of?" So that's all right, then. No review needed, and certainly no tightening up of the act.

Naturally, the Australian government will give his contention all the attention it merits, all the way to the waste paper basket. In its review, it will want to examine the ways tobacco companies have been exploiting the new electronic media that has proved so effective for communicating with teenagers. The

government will also want to know about the companies' involvement with discos, fashion shows, and multi-product "niche marketing" schemes to get prime peer leaders to parties, sometimes clandestinely arranged only by telephone, with the lure of top musicians, and featuring cigarette handouts amid a galaxy of talent and glamour.

When tobacco executives make crass arguments like that, especially in a country that has made it amply clear it means business, who do they think they are fooling? Do they really believe some of it? And as for the unique scale of the epidemic their product causes, at times it is hard to avoid the question: do these people really not get it?

## Latvia: window of opportunity

For once, it seems that one of the new democracies of the former Soviet Union may be able to avoid the worst of the enslavement to western tobacco companies that has happened to so many other countries in the same situation. Latvia, in fact, is actually quite an old democracy, having tasted independence and freedom in the early part of the 20th century, developing to have one of the highest standards of living anywhere in Europe in the 1930s. From 1940, it was occupied with extreme brutality first by the Soviet Union, then by Nazi Germany, and then again by the Soviets, whose pretence of allowing independence turned into forcible membership of the USSR. But eventually, in 1991, this small nation finally regained its independence. Nowadays it has around two and a half million people, including a sizeable Russian minority.

Sandwiched between Estonia and Lithuania, Latvians recently followed their Baltic neighbours by voting to join the European Union (EU). Membership of the EU, together with the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), whose ratification is among the legislative priorities of the present government over the next year, may turn out to be key factors in saving Latvia from the worst of the trends so needlessly repeated in the other former Soviet states. Some 51% of men smoke daily, but only around 19% of women.

While the relatively low female smoking prevalence is to be welcomed, health officials know it offers an irresistible opportunity for foreign tobacco companies unless the current partial advertising ban is made total as a matter of urgency. Apart from a committed health minister, herself a gynaecologist, the infrastructure of tobacco control in Latvia also enjoys several other bonuses. The health ministry and



Cigarettes and children's confectionery on display together on board the Silja Line ferry from Helsinki to Stockholm.



**Kā piedalīties?**  
Lai piedalītos akcijā, jānosūtās iebūvēta Marlboro cigarešu paciņa ar īpašu MARLBORO MILES COLLECTION nopietnā lēst.

Pacīnās iekļautas ir 5 jūdzes – katlāns ar dalībnieka anketu un akcijas noteikumiem. 1. Hēlāns – 5 jūdzes.

**Kādas ir balvas?**

**SANĀJ 50 JUDZES**  
Sagatavētais kārsts – karoja spēlētājs

**SANĀJ 125 JUDZES**  
Sagatavētais kārsts – karoja spēlētājs

Pirmais 1500. kārsts nosaukts 125 jūdzes, karoja spēlētājs karoja spēlētājs.

**Jeep WRANGLER**  
nākamie 1500 karoja spēlētājs

**Smēķēšana nodara nopietnu ļaunumu veselībai.**

A lavishly produced promotional item by the makers of Marlboro, designated for tobaccoists in Latvia—obviously not a market yet forsaken by the tobacco industry.

related government agencies contain officials well versed in tobacco control theory, and with quite enough knowledge of tobacco industry tactics to spot bogus, industry friendly policy should it show up on the radar. There are some knowledgeable and well trained officials in the right places, and the beginnings of an anti-tobacco coalition. There is a well functioning inter-ministerial commission against tobacco, though members from the health sector cannot wait for its promised reform, to remove the entirely inappropriate and counterproductive presence of tobacco industry representatives.

In its parliament, Latvia has another bonus: the composition of its members makes it unusually well prepared to pass legislation to improve health. The largest single professional grouping in parliament is not lawyers, as in so many other countries; nor is it business people, or local mayors and other party hacks of a former regime—it is doctors. Asked why, local people reply as if it is obvious: doctors are well known in their communities, and people believe what they say; and with some whiffs of corruption still lingering from the past, that makes them obvious candidates for parliament.

If the FCTC and Latvia's progress as an EU accession country have come at the right time to guide tobacco control policy on the path to health, one area requiring urgent attention is the widespread belief in government circles that tobacco tax rises will reduce total government revenue. It seems almost certain that tobacco interests were originally responsible for the sowing of this dangerous seed of false concern, but whatever the origins, it is accepted as genuine by key officials in the finance ministry, and by others in the wider world of government policy making. It has already resulted in Latvia opting for the maximum allowable time to harmonise tax levels to EU standards.

Another major task ahead concerns smoking in public places, which is

subject only to laws that are almost totally ignored. Yet good quality data shows a high level of knowledge of the dangers of passive smoking, and widespread demand for protection, especially at the workplace.

It is always unwise to be anything but pessimistic when forecasting tobacco control developments in any country; but for Latvia, the time might just be right for looking ahead with hope.

## Papua New Guinea: BAT's "utter rubbish"

Another in our occasional series about real health ministers, the sort who ignore the fact that the president's cousin is on the local board of a big tobacco company, and tell the people how it really is. Our last example was from Fiji (see Fiji: finger for BAT, *Tobacco Control* 2003;12:7), and now a rival has been spotted in the same region, in Papua New Guinea. In June, health minister Melchior Pep talked to journalists about an advertisement run by BAT to publicise its World Environment Day clean-up. His succinct conclusion? "Utter rubbish."

Mr Pep went on to say that the advertisement, run in two daily newspapers about "working together to create a clean environment" on 5 June, made a mockery of the efforts of health service providers to promote healthy lifestyles and a clean environment. "The damage that BAT and other international tobacco companies inflict on the human body and the environment has far-reaching consequences on the health and well-being of millions of people throughout the world," he said. "[BAT] has carefully designed this advertisement in the disguise of helping to keep the environment clean. BAT contributes to the unhealthy lifestyles of our people and the pollution of the human tissue environment. To commemorate the World Environment Day, BAT thinks and sees fit to tell us that it

is very concerned about the environment."

Mr Pep also questioned BAT's efforts to clean roadsides, asking what the company had done about the spread of cancer, commuters who are constantly being exposed to smoke, and the polluted air at public places such as markets and workplaces. In the rest of the world, health ministers' attitudes towards the tobacco industry are all too often appeasing, placatory, and conciliatory, or to put it concisely, pacific. Perhaps it is time to follow the lead of their Pacific colleagues.

## Sri Lanka: business as usual

What is the real attitude of the Sri Lankan government toward tobacco? It often seems that nothing, especially the government, can or will harm the fortunes of the tobacco industry, which largely means near monopoly holder BAT (see Sri Lanka: BAT's hack trick, *Tobacco Control* 2003;12:247–8). Yet at the same time, the government obviously wants to appear to be following the right course, and was among the first in the world to approve the ratification of the FCTC.

Does it really mean business? If so, a recent plethora of aggressive promotion could mean that manufacturers are desperately making hay while the sun shines, until at last, under legislation drafted to comply with the FCTC, further opportunity for recruitment to smoking is closed off. Alternatively, it may just mean that the confident prediction of BAT and others is that in a country where it has always more or less done what it wants, the government's interpretation of the FCTC will mean business as usual.

Either way, BAT's promotion of its Benson & Hedges (B&H) brand continues apace, with new packaging bearing embossed "hallmark" symbols being exploited in recent ads, aiming to



An example of BAT's advertising campaign in Sri Lanka to promote its Benson & Hedges brand.

impress the brand's target audience about "quality" and "heritage" of the product. In a huge sales push—it can hardly have been to capture brand share from a rival—CTC, BAT's local subsidiary, offered rewards to retailers for their performance in a new "Sea of Fortune" sales campaign. Clearly aimed at young males, the top prize for those who bought the new packs was a 175 cc Yamaha trail motorcycle, with 75 000 other instant gifts such as camping sets, binoculars, and watches for runners up. Retailers' performance was evaluated once a week over four weeks, and those receiving good scores for product visibility, merchandising prominence, and other aspects of the campaign were given a "gift pack" containing a small B&H scanner radio together with the inevitable B&H T shirt.

If "Sea of Fortune" was male oriented, BAT has not forgotten young females. It was BAT, of course, whose sales representatives in gold saris were more than generous in their promotion of B&H cigarettes to young female visitors in a night club in Sri Lanka as long ago as 1998 (see Seimon T & Mehl GL. Strategic marketing of cigarettes to young people in Sri Lanka: "Go ahead – I want to see you smoke it now". *Tobacco Control* 1998;7:429–33). But since then, BAT has climbed on the "We've changed" bandwagon, claiming a new, scrupulously careful approach to marketing, backing it up with tons of glossy reports on social responsibility. In particular, it might have been expected to show restraint in its recent dealings with a population whose women have traditionally been non-smokers. But it hasn't changed at all. Once again, it's business as usual.

In recent months, beautiful young Swedish girls in glamorous dresses have been seen moving around nightclubs in the capital, Colombo, offering free Benson & Hedges cigarettes to young people. One journalist reported that when asked who had hired them, the young women replied that it was the local tobacco company, and that their brief was to target young people, especially girls. Their assignment was to include visits to almost all the country's nightclubs. When asked for follow up contact details, they politely refused, but perhaps remembering a briefing on industry protocol, added that they were merely trying to make the smokers switch brands.

In addition, at around the same time there were reports of a more unusual and sinister activity from Majestic City, a large shopping complex in Colombo. Once again they featured attractive women in glamorous clothes, though this time they were not giving out cigarettes, just smoking them. Health advocates are convinced they were paid solely to parade around the shopping centre to demonstrate that attractive, stylish young women now smoke. The smoking women all appeared to be foreigners, and this together with their strikingly attractive appearance ensured that they were well noticed.

For corporate self promotion, BAT has been appropriating one of the country's most famous artists, George Keyt (1901 – 1993), once described by a leading Indian art critic as "One of the few giants of the New Asia". Revered by several generations, his work is to be found, among other places, in temples around the country. What better reputation to exploit, then, for a tobacco

company? Not surprisingly, trustees of the George Keyt Foundation include CTC's chairman and its director of legal affairs. In September the foundation held exhibitions of the work of young artists, part sponsored by CTC, and opened by the country's enterprise and industry minister. CTC launched a major advertising campaign to publicise the company's altruism, though not forgetting to use B&H colours. It is thought the ads cost significantly more than the sponsorship itself.

In the light of all this, it seems very unlikely that Sri Lanka will follow up its early FCTC ratification with effective action. Even if the government tries, BAT has dug itself in well, and can look forward to many more happy trips to the bank with its brimming purse of gold.

## World: how Formula One swerved round health

On the same day that Formula One (F1) strategies to undermine tobacco control legislation were discussed at the World Conference on Tobacco or Health in Helsinki, news agencies reported that the Canadian Grand Prix was to be dropped from the 2004 calendar. F1 boss



**Canada:** A bilingual postcard created by Carte Blanche, a communication marketing agency in Montreal, pre-addressed to Bernie Ecclestone for Canadians to send to the Formula One boss to protest against the loss of Canada's top motor race. In all, 108 000 cards were distributed by the Pop Media network, and several newspapers ran ads to build awareness and support for the campaign. On the back of the card was a message asking Ecclestone whether F1 was as addicted to the tobacco industry as are billions to cigarettes, and demanding that he reconsider his sponsorship policy.



Bernie Ecclestone insisted that tobacco advertising was the sole reason for the decision. "Our problem is quite simple. The Formula One teams with tobacco-related sponsorship lose part of their revenue when a certain percentage of the events ban tobacco sponsorship." This was the reason the Belgian Grand Prix was not included in the 2003 calendar, he added.

In Belgium a law was passed in 1997 banning all tobacco advertising and sponsorship from 1 January 1999 (including F1 sponsorship). Since January 1997, there have been five attempts in the Belgian parliament (between November 1997 and December 2002) to overturn the law, which all failed. However, another attempt last July was successful for the F1 lobby and resulted in a delay of the enforcement of the ban on tobacco sponsorship of international events such as F1 until July 2005. One characteristic of the Belgian Grand Prix is that the organiser is Ecclestone. He controls the company Spa Activités, which is mandated by F1's governing body, Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA), to organise the Belgian Grand Prix in Spa Francorchamps.

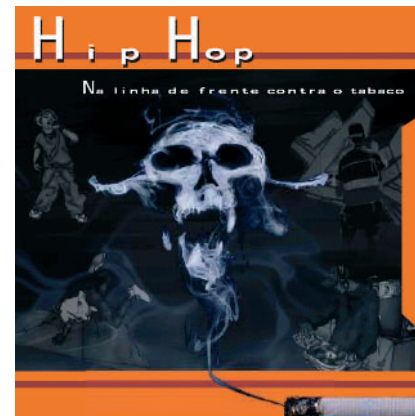
The Ecclestone principle is simple: the profits for organising the Belgian Grand Prix are for Ecclestone, and the costs for maintaining the circuit are for the government of the Walloon region. Since 1977 the Walloon region invested some €44 million (US\$50 million) in the circuit at Francorchamps. It may be prestigious to organise a Grand Prix, but it is a myth to believe that it is an economic success story for the region (at least in Belgium).

It is a well known tobacco industry strategy to use exemptions for F1 tobacco sponsorship as a way to undermine tobacco control legislation in different countries around the world. So far the FIA has been successful with Chancellor Kohl of Germany in 1997, with Prime Minister Prodi of Italy in 1997, with the UK Labour government

in 1997 and 2002, and with Brazil and Belgium in 2003. There are no reasons to believe that the FIA will stop this kind of tobacco friendly lobbying activity in October 2006, despite what they promised in October 2000.

The most startling evidence of the way FIA chief Bernie Ecclestone operates was revealed when he was tricked by a Canadian radio prankster last August into thinking that he was talking to Canada's prime minister, Jean Chretien. Ecclestone was willing to consider offering a job to the Canadian PM, if Chretien could persuade the parliament to agree with an exemption for tobacco advertisement at the Canadian Grand Prix. Marc-Antoine Audette (the radio personality posing as Prime Minister Jean Chretien): "It's simple, in November 2003 I'm going to retire and maybe let's say one year after that we could work together." Ecclestone: "That would be nice. I'm sure..." Audette: "I'm sure I can convince parliament to maybe soften a little bit the loss." Ecclestone: "Super, super, super, super, nine o'clock Wednesday morning I'll call you." [The interview can be heard at: [http://www.ckoi.com/ckoi2/meilleurs\\_moments.php](http://www.ckoi.com/ckoi2/meilleurs_moments.php) and a transcript found on the same site.]

Ecclestone loves to speak to prime ministers and to put governments under pressure. In an interview with a Belgian newspaper, he said: "A prime minister who is not interested in Formula One is an idiot." In September, Ecclestone attended a ceremony in Istanbul, Turkey, to celebrate the start of construction of the new F1 circuit in the presence of the prime minister, Mr Tayyip Erdogan. The land on which the construction is taking place is legally



**Brazil:** In Rio de Janeiro City, a joint programme between state and non-governmental organisations has brought youth-friendly hip-hop music to bear in the fight against youth smoking. This CD, whose title means "Hip-hop in the frontline against tobacco", features music on tobacco themes by young composers. It has been distributed to all municipalities of Rio de Janeiro state for playing on community radio stations.

designated as a forest area and a water collection basin for Istanbul's drinking water, covered by a law that strictly bans construction.

Protests were staged by environmentalists, the local chambers of architects, forest engineers, city planners, and agricultural engineers, and, of course, medical and other health groups, who said that the scheme breached environmental protection regulations on several counts. The prime minister retorted that more trees would be planted in the area, and that organisations that had not planted trees (meaning environmental groups) had no right to criticise the project.

Consultants to the prime minister confessed that the F1 organisers expli-



Turkey's prime minister, Mr Tayyip Erdogan, at the opening ceremony of the new Formula One circuit in Istanbul. F1 organisers told the government that they would hold the race in Turkey only if tobacco sponsorship was allowed.



One of several features on the British Grand Prix extolling the Jordan team, sponsored by Benson & Hedges (B&H) cigarettes, which appeared in the August edition of the men's magazine Maxim.

citly told the government that they would organise the race in Turkey only if tobacco sponsorship were allowed. The project will cost the Turkish government an estimated US\$100 million and the first Grand Prix race is due to take place in 2005. No doubt Turkey, and the other new Grand Prix countries such as China and Bahrain, will be requested to amend their tobacco control legislation.

Under the terms of the FCTC all countries signing up to the treaty are required to ban tobacco advertising and sponsorship if such a measure is allowed under their constitution. When the FCTC comes into force, it will be the end of the FIA's ability to force countries to make a choice between F1 and effective public health law. There will no longer be any need for Bernie Ecclestone to bother prime ministers around the world. Perhaps it's now up to the Canadian prime minister to offer Ecclestone a new job.

As this article went to press, it appeared that Ecclestone had not been successful this time. The Canadian Grand Prix was reinstated in the F1 calendar, despite the refusal of the Canadian government to amend the law.

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## UK: getaway cars?

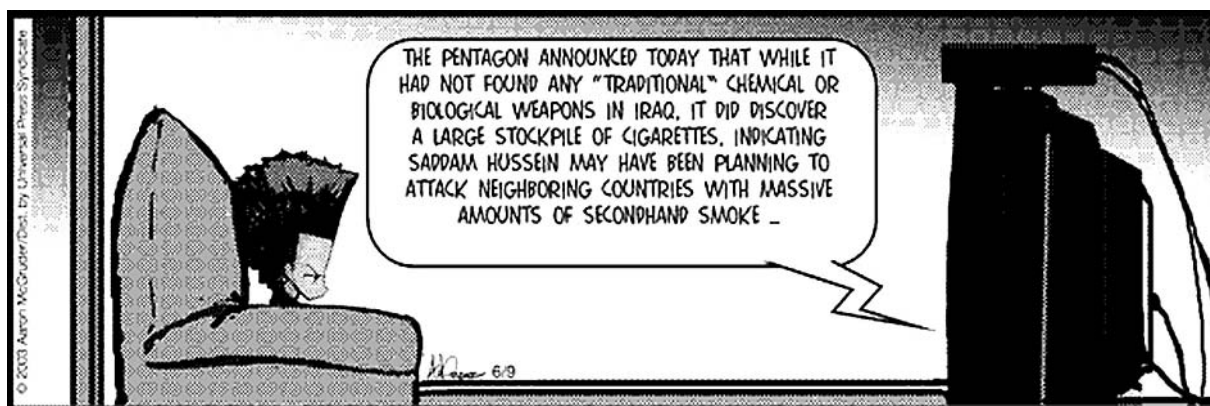
Despite all newspaper, magazine, and billboard advertising of tobacco products having been banned in the UK since last February, several features on the British Grand Prix extolling the Jordan team, sponsored by Benson & Hedges (B&H) cigarettes, appeared in the August edition of the men's magazine *Maxim*. Each double page spread of the eight page piece bore the heading, "Maxim F1 special in association with Benson & Hedges Jordan", with a B&H logo above a panel which itself contained two more, larger B&H logos at top and bottom. Altogether, the eight pages contained 40 B&H logos. Enquiries revealed the apparent involvement of an advertising agency working on behalf of Gallaher, makers of B&H in the UK. A formal complaint was made to trading standards officers by Action on Smoking and Health (ASH), contending that the placing of the articles was in breach of the ad ban, though Formula One's exemption from the ban on tobacco sponsorship until 2005 may be cited in defence. ASH says the case illustrates how loopholes or exceptions to any ad ban will be exploited to the full, and that only a total ban, rigorously enforced, can stop tobacco promotion.

## Myanmar: BAT creates a stink

BAT inadvertently created a bad smell in certain official circles in the USA recently when what appears to be an attempt to help Myanmar (Burma) increase its foreign currency earnings went wrong. BAT has been under fire from human rights campaigners and some governments on the grounds that its continued business partnerships with the military regime in Myanmar discourage reform. However, the background to the latest problem was distinctly fishy.

BAT is thought to have established relationships with local exporters to win foreign currency to buy raw materials for its Rangoon plant, though it insisted it had no direct connection with fish or any other kind of foodstuffs. Nevertheless, a report from the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) last December came to light recently showing that a shipment stamped with the name of BAT's subsidiary Rothmans of Pall Mall contained a "filthy, putrid or decomposed substance...unfit for human consumption". Nothing new there, you may think; the FDA must simply have opened some of the cigarettes. But the packing cases contained not cigarettes, but frozen, peeled shrimps.

# The lighter side



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