

News analysis

India: states ban oral tobacco

Gutkha and paan masala, two oral products used with or without tobacco, were banned from 1 August 2002 in Maharashtra state, where even school and college students are increasingly becoming users. The ban covers the manufacture, storage, distribution, sale, and advertising. A 1997 survey in the capital Mumbai (formerly known as Bombay) found that 10–40% of school children and 70% of college students used the products.

Perhaps the most interesting aspects of the move concern how it was made. First, no new law has been passed: the ban was made following a state Cabinet decision, by simply issuing an order under “enabling” legislation, the Prevention of Food Adulteration Act. Second, it is widely rumoured that Mr Sharad Pawar, leader of the ruling political party, was diagnosed and treated for oral cancer due to gutkha use just a few days before the Cabinet decision.

Many are doubtful about the potential effectiveness of the Maharashtra ban, as there are few officials to enforce it and at present users and illegal traders can cross into neighbouring Madhya Pradesh or Gujarat states to get it. In addition, a ban on the sale of gutkha within 100 metres of educational institutions and government owned offices in Mumbai has not been enforced. However, the net is tightening, with Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh passing their own, similar bans, and the Rajasthan cabinet has decided in principle to ban gutkha. In addition, the high courts in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh have also ordered bans, although in each case, implementation has been stayed by the Supreme Court on procedural grounds. Oral tobacco is estimated to cause over 160 000 new oral cancer cases in India every year.

All articles written by David Simpson unless otherwise attributed. Ideas and items for News Analysis should be sent to David Simpson at the address given on the inside front cover

Germany: tobacco industry makes further inroads

Germany’s resistance to effective tobacco control is well recognised and is contributing to the rapidly rising rates of female smoking in former East Germany. But the German government’s recent acceptance of €11.8 million (US\$11.6 million) of tobacco industry funding for a five year tobacco control programme purporting to prevent children and adolescents from smoking has caused further outcry. The German government claims such measures are in the interest of its population. It has clearly not read the internal documents that reveal the industry’s true attitude and the importance it attaches to encouraging rather than preventing youth smoking, nor evidence which suggests that at best such programmes are ineffective and at worst counterproductive. It should also perhaps re-read its contract with the industry, which explicitly stipulates that “the cigarette industry, their products or cigarette trading must not be discriminated against and adult smokers must not be denigrated”. This must clarify therefore, for those in any doubt, that the campaign was never intended to discourage youth smoking.

ANNA GILMORE
ELLEN NOLTE

*London School of Hygiene
and Tropical Medicine, UK
anna.gilmore@lshtm.ac.uk*

Germany: how did it get like this?

The feeling on the ground in Germany is eerily reminiscent of the early days in the USA or the UK: the enemy seems all powerful, the press appears to believe nearly every word they say, and the general public does not seem concerned either way. At best, people think the health side is exaggerating, at worse that they are some sort of control freaks, unpleasantly reminiscent of a part of Germany’s history that everyone would like to forget. In tobacco control terms, Germany is not just the bad boy of Western Europe, but also a country that disobeys all the usual rules when comparing current

smoking rates, including those among health professionals, with levels of education, traditions of intelligent social administration, and the pragmatic application of science.

While it is too simplistic to focus all the blame on Adolf Hitler, his hatred of smoking put a lasting stain on what was to become Germany’s most serious public health issue, and the unfortunate shadow of history hung over the nation’s public health for many years. For tobacco control, it was probably a major factor in preventing Germany from becoming a pioneer and leader in this field of health policy. For example, in the years immediately after the second world war, cancer researchers who suggested that an investigation should focus on tobacco may have found themselves given a rather wide berth. Similarly, sensible people, aware of the abuse of public health policy for extreme political purposes, would have been unlikely to advocate that the government should implement action on smoking.

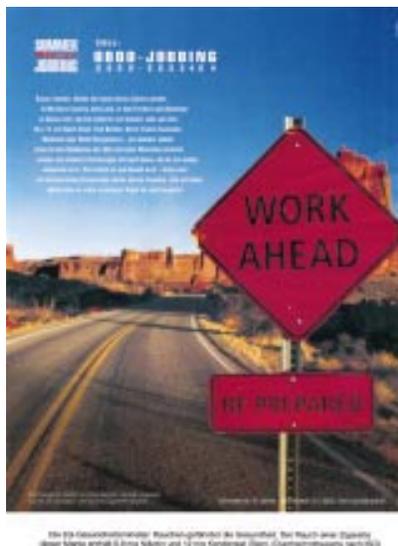
When Doll and Hill published their retrospective study of smoking and lung cancer in 1950, one might have expected German doctors to be among the first to sit up and take notice. After all, German scientists had been pioneers in this area of research, with one producing convincing evidence of the link more than 50 years earlier. When the two British scientists followed with their pioneering prospective study of British doctors in the mid 1950s, would not their German colleagues have been the most likely to follow the fortuitous model of using doctors as the subjects in further research, which had so boosted compliance in the British doctors’ study? But many German doctors would have seen this whole area of research as a poisoned chalice. The distrust of government action on what could be seen as personal behaviour lasted well into our own times, and explains why public health has only become a recognised speciality within German medicine within the last decade.

In addition, after the second world war, the newly created West Germany was a sitting target for a huge invasion from American tobacco companies, whose cigarettes became a form of currency as the country got back on its feet. Today, the tobacco industry in Germany, both local and international,

represents one of the largest concentrations of “Big Tobacco” in any European country, with the biggest local firm aspiring to join the big boys in the international club. German politicians do not oppose action on tobacco just because of lack of education about the topic; at important times of decision, such as over the European Union directive on tobacco advertising, the industry has had up to 10 people lobbying full time. It takes two to be influenced by tobacco money, of course. Most of the political parties and individual politicians who take tobacco money see absolutely nothing wrong with it. Even the Green Party, once the brightest hope of environmentalists in Europe, has turned a brownish shade, impermeably tainted by tobacco funding.

The news media, too, appear unconcerned by what goes on to keep smoking the norm in Germany. With honourable exceptions, such as certain freelance journalists whose investigative articles have been spiked by those who bought them, the press and broadcast media generally ignore the most important output of tobacco control advocates; and there is widespread suspicion that television soap operas are tobacco funded.

The results of such long term lack of attention to the tobacco problem are not hard to see. The *average* age of starting smoking among German children is 13.6 years. Some schools even have smoking areas, to enable pupils



Advertisement appearing in the German student *Unicum* for “Marlboro Summer Jobbing”. The tobacco manufacturer covers students’ accommodation in the USA while they work as ranger assistants, farmhands or location scouts.



Another cigarette advertising campaign in *Unicum*, this time for Polo cigarettes, featuring young couples embracing and inviting readers to send in their suggestions for the best places to flirt.

aged 16 or more to smoke if they want to. Revealingly, efforts to curb street vending machines, a popular source of cigarettes for young people, were strongly challenged by the industry. Eventually a compromise was reached, with the machines being upgraded—this is high tech Germany—with microchips that respond to identity cards to restrict sales to adults. Sales are therefore down, but it does at least preserve the 800 000 machines on Germany’s street corners; and it may not be unknown for young people to borrow their older siblings’ or friends’ ID card to make a purchase. Magazine ads often refer readers to websites leading to tobacco promotion pages where attractive prizes can be won, ideal for attracting young people, with their superior web navigation skills.

The students’ magazine *Unicum*, distributed free in universities and colleges throughout Germany, not only carries regular tobacco ads, but appears to plug other tobacco promotions relentlessly. For example, Polo-Cigaretten-Fabrik (Polo GmbH), recently acquired by the UK’s Imperial Tobacco group, runs special promotions for its Polo cigarette brand in association with *Unicum*, using a series

of quirky ads centred on flirting and other aspects of young people’s relationships. One ad shows a young couple in an intimate embrace, describing in mock serious detail what good exercise kissing can be, with between 29 and 34 muscles involved. Readers are invited to send in their suggestions of the best places to flirt, with the lucky winners of a draw being sent a voucher entitling themselves and a partner to Sunday brunch on the sun terrace of the best restaurant in their town. Enjoy Sunday morning, they are told; and don’t forget your sunglasses.

Needless to say, Philip Morris is in on the student act, too. Each year, readers of *Unicum* can rely on a regular dose of plugs for “Marlboro Summer Jobbing”—kids are told that, “In Marlboro country, where freedom and adventure are at home”, everyone aged 18 and over can feel like a cowboy or cowgirl. With flights to the south west of the USA and accommodation paid by Marlboro, they can work as a ranger assistant, farmhand or location scout.

Ironically, travellers visiting Germany in the 1930s reported on the country’s admirable tradition of encouraging young people, especially students, to travel, with even the



Demonstrators outside the UN building in New York, calling on the US government to take a more responsible role in the FCTC negotiations.

USA: New York protest

In a year when the world grew ever more cynical about the United States' role in the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) negotiations, it was heartening to see protests by US citizens calling on their government to take a responsible, leadership role in support of a tough convention. In July, several hundred people, including around 200 teenagers involved with the Reality Check youth empowerment programme, convened near the



These children's shorts were bought recently in Niger. No doubt the makers of Marlboro, if contacted about promoting the brand to children, would throw their hands up in horror and decry the outrageous and illicit reproduction of their logo, and commission teams of writ-bearing lawyers to scour Niger's street markets trying to track down the culprits. But even if the shorts were produced entirely independently of the manufacturers, imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. The very fact that tobacco brands are among the most popular brands for illicit copying in many of the poorest countries in the world illustrates just how well known, positive, and youth friendly are the images created for cigarettes by promotional activities.

United Nations headquarters in New York City. Their message to the US delegation to the FCTC negotiations was: "Save Lives, Not Big Tobacco!". The centrepiece of the demonstration was a large model of a Marlboro pack, subtly improved to specify the contents as "US pack of lies".

Accompanying the pack were two large, removable cigarettes bearing common 'lies' that delegates said were repeatedly been promoted by both the US delegation and Philip Morris, makers of real life Marlboro cigarettes. Another two cigarettes bore straight statements, such as "Tobacco Money is Addictive". Being New York, noted for the sardonic humour of its citizens, one of the cigarettes proclaimed: "Low Tar Death is Healthier".

Pakistan: a hard and lonely struggle for the resistance

As recent editions of *Tobacco Control* have illustrated, Pakistan has become an adventure playground for young tobacco advertisers. The country has, of course, a long history of cigarette smoking, directly attributable to the strong cigarette industry fostered by its former colonial rulers, the UK. Like so many developing countries, Pakistan now lives under a different form of colonialism, with BAT and other tobacco companies, including some local imitators, greedily exploiting its large population of male smokers, and drooling at the prospect of eventually doubling their sales by recruiting the traditionally non-smoking female population.

Twenty years ago there was little sophisticated promotion and it was largely restricted to the cities. Now, not only the use of cigarettes but their promotion, too, has become much more widespread, even reaching some of the most remote and rugged areas of this large country. The Lakson Tobacco Company, a local cigarette manufacturer, has not been slow to learn the tricks of the international invaders. Far up in the north lies Lake Saif-ul-Malok, considered one of the most beautiful lakes in the world and now a burgeoning tourist destination for Pakistan's emerging middle class and others who can command the price of the four wheel drive vehicle necessary to reach it. But go to this otherwise almost untouched paradise, surrounded by beautiful mountains capped with snow even in high summer, and you will find that tobacco promotion has got there first. The shelters provided for visitors to sit and inhale the tingling fresh air and gasp at the beautiful scenery promote a Lakson brand called Morven, also the name of several beautiful lochs and mountains in Scotland. There are no hotels in this area of Pakistan, nor electricity, yet refreshment stalls are well stocked with cigarettes; and one recent visitor saw small children smoking their wares.

Meanwhile in September, doctors and other health advocates at the other end of the country received a bitter disappointment. Having been encouraged to think that the government, after some unusually severe prodding in recent years, was actually going to bite the bullet on tobacco control, they found when they saw the long awaited measures that they bore the unmistakable fingerprints of the tobacco industry. Firstly, the draft



Tobacco promotion continues to reach the most remote regions of the world—this time, the beautiful surroundings of Lake Saif-ul-Malok in northern Pakistan.

legislative proposals turned out to be restricted to the capital, Islamabad, with a straight faced explanation that health was a provincial matter, precluding the government from imposing a law on the provinces, something that may come as a surprise to health workers in other fields of interest. Secondly, tobacco promotion on television, radio and in the print media will continue as before, subject only to clearance from a special committee (an old trick pioneered in Britain).

Disappointment in the health community was profound. Doctors gathered at the Karachi Press Club and lodged a strong protest to the government about the proposed ordinance. Their press conference received extensive television and newspaper coverage. While knowing that the proposed measures would be useless as drafted, they did at least have the satisfaction of seeing how large a group they could gather at just a few days' notice. For these are working doctors, and have to leave their busy clinics and other professional commitments to make their protest. The press conference had the representatives from many academic institutions as well as various professional organisations such as the national chest and cancer societies.

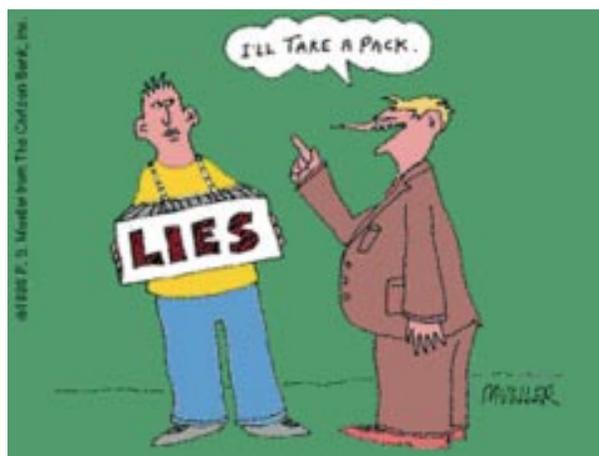
It should be added that having no budget for this sort of thing, the doctors who organised the meeting



At the opening session of the Third European Conference on Tobacco or Health held in Warsaw in June, the First Lady of Poland, the wife of the country's President, invested British epidemiologist Professor Sir Richard Peto with the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland (Officer Cross) for his contribution over many years to the country's long and successful fight against diseases caused by tobacco.

each had to pay the equivalent of almost US\$20 from their own pockets to fund the event, a significant sum in Pakistan. To fund anything like this they always try to beg funds from pharmaceutical companies, but usually draw a blank. They say they cannot help noticing that at international tobacco control meetings, world experts talk about the "global war on tobacco", but

that there is still little money available for tobacco control work in developing countries. These people have the courage and motivation to fight against the big tobacco giants, but shortage of money always lets them down. Even the cost of printing any materials comes out of their own pockets. Anyone with a solution can contact the doctors' network via this journal.



©The New Yorker Collection. Peter Mueller from Cartoonbank.com. All Rights Reserved.