Vietnam: smuggling adds value

Internal British American Tobacco (BAT) documents have been explicit about the knowledge of cigarette smuggling into Vietnam. In one document, Vietnam Status Report (12 May 1995), it was stated: “Cigarette imports were banned 6 years ago. Smuggled sales into Vietnam are currently estimated at approximately 7 bn [billion] p.a. although prior to a crack-down in 1990 (when all smuggling was virtually eliminated for 18 months) it was in the region of 12–17 bn p.a.”

The same document also stated: “SE [State Express] 555 is the major smuggled brand and there is no doubt it has a tremendous image and sales potential in the country. BAT has resisted agreeing to manufacture 555 in Vietnam due both to concerns about the ability to sell the brand as a locally manufactured product and to the possible impact of a licence outside Vietnam. However, Vinataba [the Vietnamese State monopoly] sees a licence of 555 as an attractive opportunity for the JV [joint venture], and believes that BAT’s opposition to a licence is simply to ‘protect the smuggling’.

A series of company papers showed that BAT pursued a twin track strategy to maximise its earnings from Vietnam. One track was to negotiate with the Vietnamese government and Vinataba to produce international brand cigarettes locally. The other track was smuggling. Documents describe in a detailed way the smuggling route for 555: cigarettes were produced in the UK, shipped to Singapore, sold to Singapore traders—so why has BAT not stopped supplying these traders?

The case of SE 555 smuggling raises several questions. Cigarette packs have specific codes that allow tobacco companies to track where their products are sold. A policy revealed in the internal BAT documents seems to continue today.

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.

Packs of locally produced and smuggled State Express 555 cigarettes in Vietnam, showing little difference between the front of the packs, but notable differences between the sides.

duty-free outlets are facilitating smuggling, and reinforces the need for a ban on all duty-free tobacco sales.
India: PM's bravery awards "nothing to do with our products"

According to Godfrey Phillips, the Indian subsidiary of Philip Morris that makes Red & White cigarettes, the emphasis of the Red & White bravery awards is "selfless action". The same phrase could hardly describe the company's motives for using the name of its cigarette brand instead of its company name for the scheme, whose well funded advertising campaign associates its cigarettes with bravery (see Tobacco Control 2002;11:10–11, 91). With not only the brand's name but also its distinctive colours used in the awards scheme promotions, and details of the cigarette brand just a click or two away from nauseating descriptions of the scheme on the company's website, one might have thought the manufacturers would be forced to admit to the connection. Recently, an opportunity arose for a little candour on the subject.

"Bollywood" film star Preity Zinta. Although Serbia has a thriving domestic tobacco industry, the transnational companies are not far behind. Alongside local brands, Serbs puff on Lucky Strike, Marlboro, and—for those who can afford it—Davidoff. In spring, Belgrade hosted its International Film Festival. The main sponsor was BAT.

As former Yugoslavia, the country was a key destination and shipment route for smuggled tobacco, and transnational tobacco companies have shown a keen interest in domestic production (see Tobacco Control 2002;11:92–3). Health interests campaigned for measures to curb domestic production, prevent transnational companies from taking control, and ban all tobacco advertising. New tobacco legislation enacted in February provides low interest loans for tobacco growing and manufacturing and a licensing system for tobacco manufacturers. The transnationals seem poised to pounce.

While the legislation may go some way towards combatting smuggling, it pays scant attention to health. The only provisions are to ban tobacco sales to under 18s, and require health warnings—size unspecified—on packs. The future of legislation to regulate tobacco advertising seems uncertain, following the assassination in March of the prime minister, Zoran Djindjic.

But some progress is being made. A National Commission for Prevention of Smoking has been formed, and a campaign launched in partnership with government and NGOs. Support has come from the World Health Organization, the European Agency for Reconstruction, the Canadian International Development Agency, and UNICEF. Philip Morris also offered its help—and was refused.

The first phase of the campaign concentrates on health professionals, in the hope that their lead will influence others. The target may not seem easy: more than one in three doctors (37%), and one in two nurses (52%) smoke. More than four out of 10 (42%) family doctors and one in four (25%) paediatricians smoke. But more than eight out of 10 (85%) have tried to stop, citing in the main health concerns—and just as many say they advise their patients to quit.

Concern about the health effects of smoking is high: 85% of smokers are worried about the effect of second-hand smoke on children, and 75% of smokers worry about their own health. The campaign aims to tackle both these concerns, by targeting the...
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fully tried to set fire to his shoes with a
December that same year, unsuccess-
even after a British passenger, on 22
nette lighters and matches were not—
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USA: Big Tobacco
and the lighter side of security
One of the more bizarre accounts of the
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emerged recently from Michael Moore,
film maker, journalist, and best selling
author of the satirical and less than
flattering book about his country, Stupid
white men. Moore revealed that during a
nationwide book promotion tour, he
had asked his audiences if they knew
the answer to a question that was
increasingly bothering him. As he flew
from city to city, he repeatedly passed
through airport security checks. At each
one, he dutifully emptied his pockets of
anything that might be considered a
potential security threat, in the climate
of greatly increased security awareness
following the terrorist attacks of 11

Penknives, nail files, knitting needles,
even toenail clippers were among the
long list of items prohibited in hand
baggage, yet Moore noticed that ciga-
rette lighters and matches were not—
even after a British passenger, on 22
December that same year, unsuccess-
fully tried to set fire to his shoes with a
lighter, shoes whose heels were packed
with explosives, police said later. Did
anyone know, Moore asked his audi-
ences, why on earth cigarette lighters,
one of which had already been used in
an attempted suicide bomb attack high
over the Atlantic, were missing from
such a comprehensive security list, es-
pecially since smoking was now prohi-
bited on all flights?

Moore finally got his answer at an
event in a bookshop in Arlington, Vir-
ginia, just a few miles from the Pen-
tag, target of one of the hijacked
aircraft in the 11 September attacks.
As Moore signed copies of his book
after giving his talk, a young man
approached him, introduced himself,
and said in a lowered voice that he
could answer the question, as he
worked on Capitol Hill, centre of the
government administration in
Washington DC. Butane lighters were
on the original list prepared by the
Federal Aviation Authority (FAA) and
sent to the White House for approval,
he said, but the tobacco industry
successfully lobbied the Bush adminis-
tration to have lighters and matches
removed from the banned list.

Perhaps the industry's rationale was
not just based on concern for their cus-
tomers, many of whom would want to
smoke again as soon as possible after a
flight, preferably without having to buy
another lighter. They may also have feared the association of smoking para-
phernalia with potential instruments of
death, another inch lost on the slippery
slope of social acceptability. Even more
interesting, maybe it had occurred to
them that if smokers did not immedi-
cately light up on arrival, some might get
all the way to their destinations without
smoking at all—and then what? They
might even seize the opportunity to give
up for good.

Michael Moore has filed a demand
under the Freedom of Information Act,
asking the FAA to provide him with
every relevant documentation about the
decisions that were made to allow
butane lighters and matches on board
passenger aircraft. Don't hold your
breath waiting for a full and frank
response, Mr Moore.

Sri Lanka: film's big puff for smoking
Product placement of cigarettes in
movies is nothing new, though for a
time, following the publication of hard
evidence of tobacco companies' efforts
to get their cigarettes into popular
movies in the hands of young people's
screen idols, there was a temporary
reduction in this insidious form of
promotion. It has crept back again, of
course, if with a little more subtlety
than before. In Sri Lanka, though, an
extraordinarily overt promotion of
smoking was a major and continuing
theme in a recent box office success,
whose Sinhala name Thani thatuven
piyabana translates as Flying with one
wing.

The main character in the film is a
woman who lives the life of a man.
"He" smokes throughout the film, say-
ing that smoking is one of the charac-
teristics of masculinity. Other scenes
seem to have the express purpose of
promoting smoking—a girl who tells
her boyfriend, who has put out his
cigarette when she arrives, "Why did
you put out your cigarette? I like men
who smoke"; and a doctor who offers

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her boyfriend, who has put out his
cigarette when she arrives, "Why did
you put out your cigarette? I like men
who smoke"; and a doctor who offers
his patients cigarettes during consultations. Despite the fact that the director is well known for including smoking in his work, the sheer weight of it in the film generated heated debate in the press.

A group of medical students complained about it, noting that the brand smoked was always Gold Leaf, a higher priced BAT brand. A journalist responded that they had failed to see the way smoking, so far a predominantly male habit in Sri Lanka, was being used to highlight issues raised in the film about definitions and cultural expectations of manhood and masculinity. Whatever the director’s intentions, no one seems to doubt the saturation of smoking in a film that has been packing them in all over Sri Lanka. Many insist it was irresponsible of the director and that it will play a part, however small, in perpetuating the social acceptability of the habit. Those who know about tobacco industry promotional tactics are deeply suspicious of how Gold Leaf got there. For them, Flying with one wing would have been better named Gasping with one lung.

**Pakistan: still room for brand launches**

As recent issues of *Tobacco Control* have illustrated, Pakistan continues to be blitzed by tobacco promotion, much of it from PTC, the local subsidiary of BAT (see *Tobacco Control* 2002;11:294–5). Despite both the quantity and type of promotions used, which would have been unthinkable in the UK—BAT’s home country—even before the recent advertising ban there, the company has nevertheless been trying to present itself as socially responsible. Apart from its cigarette brand promotions, BAT has been running a series of newspaper ads apparently aimed primarily at opinion leaders, to try to position itself not only as socially responsible, but as vitally important to Pakistan’s economy. Some of the “achievements” boasted about in these ads include the planting of over 24 million trees, providing a mobile dispensary for treating 3000 patients free of charge every month, and educating young people at computer learning resource centres.

The government has given conflicting signals about whether it will act to ban tobacco promotion. Meanwhile, the prevalence of smoking is already more than 40% among men and 8% among women. Not only is there already a large market to play for, but with a burgeoning middle class and changing aspirations of women, cigarette companies must be slavering at the thought of the millions still waiting to be recruited. There is clearly still room in this expanding market for new brand launches, as Philip Morris’s subsidiary Lakson Tobacco demonstrated recently with its new brand, Wembley. Ads featured models who looked hardly out of their teens, adorned with the usual youth magnet trappings, such as mobile telephones and fast cars.

Not surprisingly, the results of so much tobacco promotion over so many years are already being seen in Pakistan’s cancer clinics and cardiovascular intensive care units. The hard pressed doctors who work long hours trying to treat the victims of this needless epidemic are now nearing desperation in their constant pleas to their government to take effective action.

**Uruguay: ants versus elephants**

Earlier this year, one of the leading cigarette manufacturers seemed to be making special efforts to exploit the advantages afforded by hesitant public policies and the absence of serious controls on the publicity and sale of tobacco in Uruguay. In the capital, Montevideo, a new advertising campaign appeared for Montana cigarettes, using large posters in almost all

Series of newspaper ads run by BAT in Pakistan, promoting itself as a socially responsible company, vital to the country’s economy.
the city’s bus stops. They showed a young couple who appeared to be no more than 15 or 16 years old, looking carefree and contented, the epitome of wellbeing in full Montevidean style.

The campaign introduced the Montana brand to the market—packs of 10 cigarettes cost just US$0.30 c, the price of a small bag of potato chips. The advertising would clearly appeal to pre-adolescents who have recently begun secondary school, and the price would be easily affordable to them.

Tobacco companies sponsor the majority of cultural and sports activities followed by young people. They are even the permanent, official sponsors of the multimedia company that owns the television rights of the national soccer team, as well as sponsoring the players themselves.

Recent research shows not only that smoking prevalence is high among 13–15 year olds (24.1%), but also that while only 35% of 13 year olds have tried tobacco, by the age of 15, the large majority (68%) have tried it. One of every four of these young smokers says that they smoke daily. Young people who are socially and economically disadvantaged tend to be particularly affected. There are few real impediments to prevent children buying tobacco—the legal age law was cited as an impediment by only 7% of young respondents in the same research, and two thirds of children who smoke reported that they could buy cigarettes freely.

In Uruguay it will be increasingly difficult to promote health and to speak frankly with young people about addictive substances unless a responsible brake is put on the tobacco promotion directed at them. The Montana campaign is just one example of the “hidden curriculum” presented to young people through mass communications. To the extent that supply largely determines demand, the educational task will only be effective if it is backed with coherent measures to regulate not only access to cigarettes, but exposure of young people to tobacco and tobacco promotion. The work of ants that is going on in schools and in homes is innocuous in the face of what the cigarette company elephants are doing.

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A longer version of this article, in Spanish, can be found at www.mecaep.edu.uy/esa