

News analysis

Bangladesh: bikers against tobacco

Anyone who has been to South Asia will know that the prevailing sound in many of its bustling cities is that of scooters, small motorcycles, and their larger rickshaw siblings, all popping engines and high pitched, raspy hooters as they weave in and out of the traffic in a chaotic, never ending ballet. What interests the young men who ride the bikes? British American Tobacco (BAT) probably reckons pop music is high on the list, and its Star Search promotion for Benson & Hedges cigarettes is geared to such potential customers. The promotion involves a contest for new rock groups which perform at a concert, with one being awarded a trophy. BAT gives out promotional materials, though no big prizes, and gains massive coverage on broadcast media and in newspapers, where it runs high visibility ads in the weeks leading up to the event.

On 30 May this year, however, a group of scooters and motorcycles converged on Dhaka's Sheraton Hotel, venue of this year's Star Search (now in its sixth year), whose riders were far from likely to become BAT customers. These were bikers with a mission, and once at their destination, they presented letters requesting the Sheraton to end its association with Star Search and support the national tobacco control movement instead. They explained to the hotel and the media that Star Search was simply a way of attracting young people to become addicted to cigarettes, and should be banned.

The rally was organised by Pratyasha, an anti-drug organisation, and the Welfare Association for Cancer Care, with participation by Work for a Better Bangladesh. The two-wheel protest was yet another example of the creative tobacco control and advanced networking for which Bangladesh health advocates have become renowned in recent years. And tobacco industry people may care to reflect that none other



Bangladesh bikers demonstrating against BAT's Star Search promotion for Benson & Hedges cigarettes.

than BAT itself helped to galvanise many of them into a coalition in response to its outrageous "Voyage of Discovery" by an ocean going yacht, called, with fitting lack of subtlety, the John Player Gold Leaf (see *Tobacco Control* 2000;9:130-1).

Canada: chicanery in the chicanes

Formula 1 (F1) racing cars fly by so fast it requires slow motion replay to judge what's really happened. In the whirl and blur of real time action, the Canadian F1 Grand Prix race in Montreal in June appeared to show tobacco control gaining a lap on the smoke industry. On closer examination, however, the image

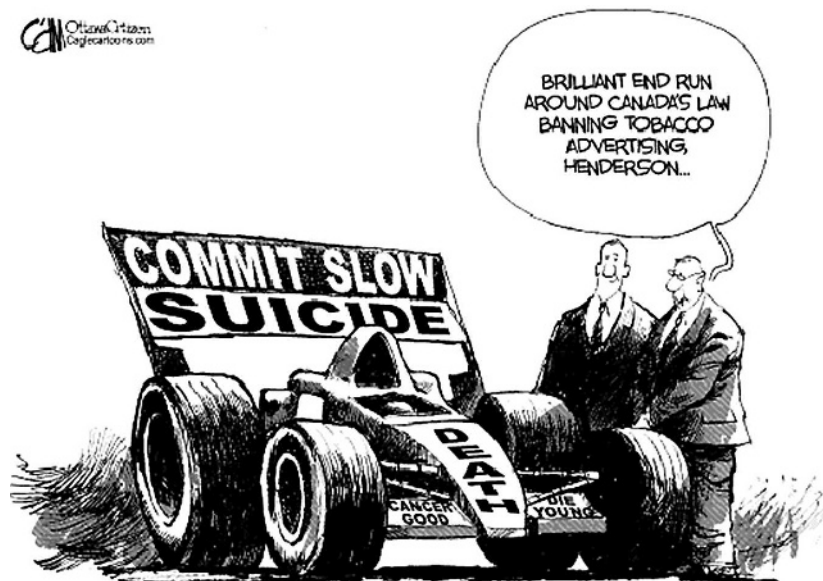
is actually fuzzier, the result less obvious. Michael Schumacher won in Montreal, as almost everywhere else on the F1 circuit, but whose interests are really coming out ahead?

Canada's Tobacco Act, adopted in 1997, was supposed to put an end to industry sponsorship of sporting and cultural events. Major tennis and golf tournaments, as well as a raft of music, comedy, and fireworks festivals, all managed to free themselves from the grasp of nicotine stained dollars. However, some ash-laden lobbying earned Big Tobacco no less than a seven year reprieve for a "transition period". Running his own small but plutocratic fiefdom, F1 boss Bernie Ecclestone threatened to cancel the 2004 Canadian event if further exemptions were not accorded. The cartoon on this page highlights one healthy response to the industry's manipulation and Ecclestone's strong arm tactics.

After a lengthy, confusing game played out, with the race tentatively cancelled, revived and cancelled again, the Canadian and Quebec government finally conceded Cdn\$12 million (US\$8.8 million) over three years to "compensate" the five tobacco sponsored teams for having to cover up their logos.

Politicians spun their defeat into a victory, taking credit for having saved a prestigious international event. Tobacco

Ottawa Citizen
Cartoonists.com



Cartoon responding to the tobacco industry's manipulation of the Canadian Grand Prix in Montreal. © Cam Cardow, The Ottawa Citizen.

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control advocates from around the world congratulated their Canadian colleagues for ensuring that a tobacco ad-free event was beamed into their countries. Certainly, compared to the Malaysian debacle earlier this year (Malaysia: racing round the hurdles, *Tobacco Control* 2004;13:106–7), the tobacco presence seemed relatively modest yet, up close, it was far more significant, even if at times more subtle.

Massive, pre-race French and English language press coverage included file photos from earlier Grand Prix in Montreal and elsewhere showing “Schumi” and his Marlboro colours and logos as dominant in print as they are on the racetrack. Even without the logos in race and victory podium photos, the Marlboro colours are as evocative as ever. There’s a reason why Philip Morris intends to continue sponsoring Ferrari, even after the European Union’s ban on tobacco advertising comes into force in 2006. The response might not share the sense of urgency and immediacy displayed by Pavlov’s dogs’ rings—smokers are always writing letters to editors huffily declaring they don’t light up just because they’ve seen an F1 driver on a billboard—but it’s an equally real reaction all the same.

In Montreal, the most cynical element of the industry’s “adaptation” to the law came from Benson & Hedges, which blocked out some letters on its cars’ spoilers to form “Be on Edge”. As edgy as a message can be, it forced viewers to mentally complete the brand name, aided by the usual, evocative yellow and black colours. BAT’s Lucky Strike car placed “Look Left” and “Look Right” on either wing, another cheeky name variation.

After the Montreal Grand Prix, four of the top finishers were disqualified for technical violations. Even when the race is over, then, the results are not always what they appear to be. Schumacher continues to win—he took the US Grand Prix a week after Montreal, with his and team mate Rubens Barrichello’s Marlboro logos covered up while those of BAT’s Takuma Sato were not, due to differing team obligations related to the US Master Settlement Agreement—and Big Tobacco continues to adapt. The Chinese Grand Prix may ban billboards but allow logos on cars and drivers. In India, health officials worry that billboards of Schumacher may constitute “surrogate advertising for a tobacco product”, but confusion reigns.

The Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) insists that each party to the convention “shall, in accordance with its constitution or constitutional principles, undertake a comprehensive ban of all tobacco

advertising, promotion and sponsorship”. Will that be enough to red flag tobacco industry sponsorship of F1 racing, or will the industry just keep motoring through the chicanes with its own special blend of cleverness, daring, and chicanery? The view from Montreal is decidedly unclear. A complaint about tobacco industry “creativity” has been filed with Health Canada, but it’s uncertain whether anything will be different when next year’s race spins around.

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USA/World: TFK’s QuiTIP database

The Washington DC based Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids (TFK) has developed a new resource, the Quitting and Reducing Tobacco Use Inventory of Products database, or QuiTIP for short. This free, searchable online database currently contains information on around 80 different products sold in the USA and internationally as tobacco use cessation aids ([https://secure.tobaccofreekids.org/Cessation/.](https://secure.tobaccofreekids.org/Cessation/))

Information on each product (taken from product labels and websites) includes details about the manufacturers, directions for use, product ingredients, warnings, disclaimers, and health claims, together with images of the products and/or their packaging. The products are grouped in two categories: those approved for use in the USA, and all others, such as homeopathic, dietary, and nutritional supplements, and herbal remedies—the vast majority on the database fall into this second category. In addition, evidence of product effectiveness is quoted from US and international public health authorities, and there are links to relevant evidence based reviews and statutory provisions in US legislation, including those against misleading and deceptive claims. The database does not include any behavioural interventions, but does provide links to evidence about which are effective.

Vietnam: health wins at South-East Asia games

Last year saw a double first for the South East Asian Games (SEA Games), a regional athletics event held every two years. Eleven countries participated in the prestigious event, the 22nd in the contest’s history, but it was the first time it had been hosted by Vietnam, and

the first time it was designated tobacco-free.

This meant much more than simply banning smoking in sports arenas; all related venues, indoor or outdoor, training areas, athletes’ living quarters and staff areas, were made smoke-free, and a comprehensive range of other measures aimed to ensure that any opportunity for promotion was left where it belongs—in the hands of health, not tobacco.

Key players in the substantial task of planning and implementing the policy included the World Health Organization (WHO)—the move was initiated to support the tobacco-free sports strategy developed by its Western Pacific region in 2002—and Vietnam’s ministry of health, through its national tobacco control programme VINACOSH (Vietnam Committee on Smoking and Health).

A pivotal aspect of the plan was a Memorandum of Agreement signed by all the main players, which acted as a catalyst for action and clarified many practical issues. A model of comprehensiveness, it defined “tobacco-free” and “smoke-free” games as: “having no tobacco sales, sponsorship, advertising, or any form of promotion permitted at any games site. Smoking to be permitted only in designated areas, and substantial efforts made to provide useful and accurate information about tobacco use to athletes, spectators, staff, and other visitors attending the 22nd SEA games.”

WHO provided technical assistance in developing the regulations, and financial support for training workshops for volunteers, on site officials and key staff. It also supported VINACOSH and the organising committee in implementing the policies, and provided accurate information about the harmful effects of tobacco to athletes, officials, referees, spectators, staff, and other visitors, and for wider health promotion in Vietnam.

The training workshops, policy communication, and public education and information, including television spots, billboards, and features in the press, were all major tasks in themselves; and as befits any worthwhile public health activity, the plan was carefully evaluated. Results found a high level of success overall, with generally good compliance. There was no evidence of tobacco promotion or sales at any venues, and little smoking at indoor venues, including press areas. While there was some smoking in outdoor venues, especially the main stadium, there was scarcely any at all at major events such as the opening and closing ceremonies.

Local health workers felt that apart from achieving its primary objectives,



Traditional lanterns made from about 4500 Gold Leaf cigarette packs, on display at a Buddhist temple in Sri Lanka.

About 4500 Gold Leaf packets were used to make the lanterns, which were seen by some 20 000 people.

Meanwhile, a more sinister turn of events concerns the Samurdhi government agency, whose work focuses mainly on poverty alleviation. In the past, it has participated in World No Tobacco Day on a significant scale, by running an ingenious smoking cessation scheme that also raises funds for charity. It provides money boxes to young smokers who want to quit, for saving what they would otherwise spend on

smoking, then collects the money and uses it to build a house for one of its aid recipients. Many countries would relish such a creative scheme that not only helps people stop smoking, but also produces a highly tangible, worthwhile benefit for the needy. However, a senior government official recently revealed that CTC has offered to build a house every year and make donations to Samurdhi recipients, in place of Samurdhi's cessation savings scheme. What could more neatly illustrate BAT's idea of social responsibility?

FCTC: how will they keep pushing?

More clues are emerging about how, apart from using Formula One and a few other high profile renegades, tobacco companies think they can keep on promoting their brands as increasing numbers of countries adopt comprehensive tobacco control laws under the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC). In those without existing or effective legislation, of course, an obvious first line of action is to lobby hard to ensure that any new legislation introduced is ineffective. Japan leads the way here, with the ministry of finance, not the health ministry, formulating Japan's response to the FCTC, due to its status as guardian of the government's controlling interest in Japan Tobacco (JT).

In such pushover conditions, it is not surprising to find proposed new health warnings for industry apologists to die for, with misleading texts such as "Smoking could be one of the causes of lung cancer for you", and sentences mentioning "epidemiological studies" which are guaranteed to bore or bamboozle and, seeing it is proposed that the warnings cover only 30% of the pack, hard to read, too. JT was taking advice from US tobacco companies from as far back as the mid 1980s, and industry documents show that Philip Morris in particular assisted with and sometimes also supervised JT's actions and statements on smoking and health issues. It looks as though this sort of relationship still exists.



Brazil: Continuing its leading role in Latin American tobacco control, Brazil is forging ahead with new health warnings. Based on the principle that familiarity can lessen effectiveness, the health ministry's tobacco control agency Anvisa has developed some of the most striking images in the world. The warnings, due to appear on a rotating basis on all cigarette packs sold in Brazil by late August, include some which even the most determined smoker may find hard to ignore. Could anyone really face pictures like this before breakfast? The text of the warnings are (from left to right): "This necrosis was caused by tobacco consumption"; "Smoking causes spontaneous abortion"; "He is a victim of tobacco. Smoking causes vascular disease that may lead to amputation"; "Smoking causes cancer in the larynx".

On advertising, Japan’s finance ministry does not seem to understand that a ban on promotion means just that—a ban; instead, it is proposing mere restrictions on tobacco ads, based partly on those tired old tobacco industry voluntary curbs. Thus Japan is proposing to allow advertisements up to 12 times a year and three times a month in daily newspapers, with no restrictions at all on magazine ads.

Meanwhile, in Europe, the industry has been getting back to basics, trying to prevent ratification or accession to the treaty by governments yet to take such action. In Georgia, for example, industry officials were working with members of the new parliament earlier this year, to try to prevent ratification, and will no doubt be keeping up the pressure to avoid accession. Even in countries with moderately good tobacco control, tobacco companies may still have about a decade of what they would call “a level playing field”—business as usual—while proper enforcement backed up by public support and compliance catches up.

But in countries where reasonably strong legislation already exists, more sinister plans are being hatched. In the UK, where public debate on banning smoking in public places has at last broken through to include cabinet level discussion, the industry must feel particularly vulnerable. Not only have there been widespread reports that a commitment to act will feature in the governing Labour Party’s next general election manifesto, but the much cited success across the Irish Sea prompts an industry nightmare of a British government following Ireland’s lead.

The Irish ban on all workplace smoking, including hospitality premises, was fought tooth and nail by the hospitality industry, with the usual support from

tobacco interests. Britain would be an even greater loss to the tobacco industry, both in terms of subsequent market decline and the likely international domino effects. Perhaps this is one reason why British American Tobacco (BAT) recently advertised for “Business Managers (Hotels, Bars Restaurants and Clubs)” to “forge lasting strategic relationships with key customers in this dynamic sector... to optimise business performance”. The job involves “building strategic business relationships, influencing customer awareness, planning and executing brand strategies”. This sounds like a two-for-one objective—ensuring any proposed ban is resisted as strongly as possible, and promoting BAT’s brands while they’re at it.

The BAT job ad was illustrated with a sample of what the successful applicants’ diaries might look like, filled with appointments from morning through to the small hours at some of London’s most glamorous hotels, clubs, and bars. Reminiscent of industry attempts to use such venues for promotion in Australia, the ad indicates that existing ad bans are unlikely to be enough to stop the next generation of promotion. Only ensuring that any and every effort to promote tobacco is a serious legal offence, as for heroin or cocaine, can stop it altogether.

Turkey: F1 keeps on coming

Having started in a surreptitious way, the advance of Formula One (F1) on the previously auto-sportingly uninterested people of Turkey went public in 2003, when a curious ceremony was held to begin work on the country’s first F1 track (see *Tobacco Control* 2003;12:346–8). It was curious not because the prime



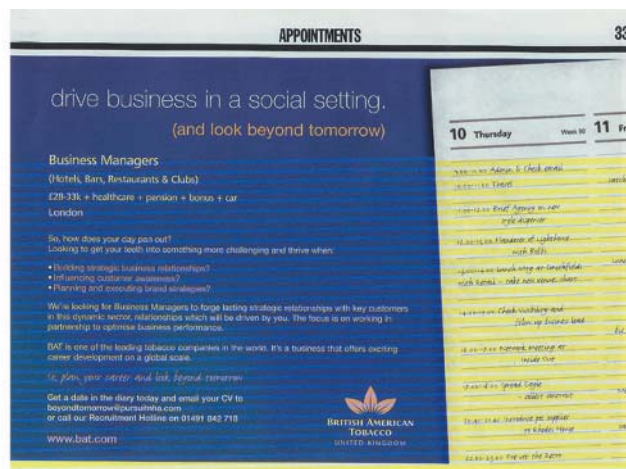
A small child (just right of car) admires a Benson & Hedges F1 racing car displayed recently in Metroland, a large shopping mall in Istanbul.

minister attended, but because he appeared to feel no embarrassment about the site. Any such construction was supposed to be strictly forbidden there, due to it being a protected forest area that also serves as a collection basin for Istanbul’s drinking water. Nor did the premier appear to be concerned about apparently giving in to pressure from F1 bosses to allow tobacco sponsorship as a condition for organising a Turkish F1 race, even though Turkey had passed a total ban on all tobacco promotion. Health advocates got their protests as far as the mayor of Istanbul, who confided that the issue was beyond his authority: the prime minister had decided the project should go ahead.

Confusingly, government authorities and the Turkish Automobile Federation subsequently sought to reassure the public health community that the race would, after all, be tobacco-free. If the tobacco companies agreed, presumably they had in mind the sort of “tobacco-free” extravaganza of tobacco



Left: A smoker at Madrid airport blatantly ignores the no-smoking sign behind him. Right: A UK ad placed by BAT, advertising for “Business Managers (Hotels, Bars Restaurants and Clubs)”, indicates that existing ad bans are unlikely to be enough to stop the next generation of tobacco promotion.



promotion seen earlier this year in Malaysia (see *Tobacco Control* 2004;13:106–7). Brand promotions have already begun to appear in public places in Turkey, as part of the run-up to the first race, scheduled for 2005. A Benson & Hedges (B&H) car was displayed recently in Metroland, a large shopping mall in Istanbul, proclaimed as part of a world roving activity including Bahrain and Shanghai, two more of the new “Let’s keep tobacco money after all” F1 venues.

The Istanbul display was opened by the mayor of Sisli, the district where Metroland is sited. He already had experience of tobacco promotion, having organised a Spring festival in his municipality with sponsorship from Japan Tobacco (JT), but at least with that one, he sounded contrite when responding to critics, saying he had not known of JT’s involvement because a PR company had done all the work. While presumably he realised that B&H was a cigarette, he may not have thought about the fascination exerted by racing cars on young children. But when he read about the car display in the newspapers, complete with large photographs of the B&H car, he should have spotted the very essence of tobacco companies’ love of F1, a child clearly in thrall to all that power and glamour.

USA: nightingales sing at PM’s AGM

For the first time, nurses from across the USA attended the annual shareholders meeting of Philip Morris in April, in East Hanover, New Jersey, to call on the company to voluntarily end active promotion of cigarettes. Afterwards, members of the Nightingales, a nurses’ advocacy group called after the famous 19th century reforming British nurse Florence Nightingale, held a reading and shared a display of letters from previously secret tobacco industry documents, sent to the company by its dying customers and their families and never before exposed.

The nurses were first to speak during the public comment period, asking Louis Camilleri, chief executive of Altria (the new name for Philip Morris), whether a company ethics committee actually read the letters from suffering customers and



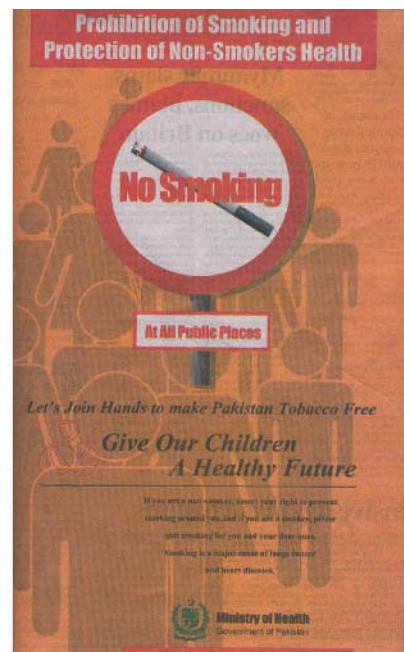
Florence Nightingale, the 19th century reforming British nurse.

their families, and what ethical criteria were used in deciding whether to promote deadly tobacco products. Unsurprisingly, Camilleri failed to provide an answer, later repeating the industry mantra about smoking being a choice consumers made with knowledge of the risks involved. Ab Brody, a nurse from San Francisco, speaking to

one of the shareholder resolutions, said, “Nobody ever ‘chooses’ to suffocate and die in pain and terror. That wasn’t a choice they made. No; they chose the tobacco industry’s image of cool, fun, glamour. And that’s a big, fat lie.”

Then, at the request of Sharon Brown, a nurse from Arizona, shareholders observed 30 seconds of silence in honour of her own father, who would have been celebrating his 74th birthday that day, except that he died from lung cancer from Philip Morris’s products. “I’m here to honour him,” she said, “and to try to keep this company from taking away somebody else’s Dad.”

“We’re here to say that this can’t go on,” said Nightingale’s organiser Ruth Malone, associate professor of nursing at the University of California, San Francisco, who first found the letters while doing research on the previously secret tobacco industry documents. “The tobacco industry spends more than \$1 million an hour on making their deadly, addictive products look fun, cool, and glamorous—but these letters show the terrifying, painful reality of what cigarettes actually do.”



Pakistan: At last, with considerable efforts from Pakistan’s doctor led network of tobacco control advocates, Pakistan is creaking into some sort of action. Latest successes are the decision of the national airline, PIA, to go entirely smoke-free—the policy being introduced to mark World No Tobacco Day; and a new public places campaign by the health ministry.