

# NEWS ANALYSIS

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.

## Asia: choppy seas for BAT butt boat

British American Tobacco's John Player Gold Leaf, the only known sailing boat to advertise two cigarette brands at the same time, sailed into a storm of controversy last September as it approached Sri Lanka. Billed as undertaking the "Voyage of discovery", the 80 foot racing yacht had left Tower Bridge in London, UK, in mid June with a seven person British crew. BAT's press hype, faithfully reported by most newspapers in Bangladesh (but not *Bhorer Kagaj*—see *Tobacco Control* 1998;7:228-9), boasted that the "challenging and exciting" 170 day trip would cover 17 countries and three continents, with the ultimate destination being the Bangladesh port of Chittagong in the Bay of Bengal, scheduled for November. BAT augmented the coverage with large colour advertisements in the newspapers covering the story. So all seemed set fair for a straightforward cruise (the boat was not, after all, racing against competitors) to promote cigarettes to some of the company's prime developing markets.

However, the organisers omitted to take a forecast of the climate of public opinion along the route. Clearly, many people were appalled at the trip's association with the largest known cause of respiratory illness, cancer, and heart disease, none of which mix well with the rigours of intercontinental sailing. In October, as the boat was nearing the southern Sri Lankan port of Galle, widespread protests were organised by local health groups. When the boat failed to enter port as expected, no official explanation was forthcoming, but reading between the lines of statements from Galle harbour police, local health advocates concluded that the boat's plans for a Sri Lankan layover had either been changed or cancelled as a result of the protests.

One can understand the reluctance of the hapless skipper. In addition to earlier posters branding the voyage an invasion designed to recruit the

nation's youth, a new message had appeared asking the government to arrest the "merchants of death", and for the vessel to be impounded or

**GO FOR THE CHALLENGE!**  
**YOU COULD WIN GOLD!**

Fill in your details, answer all the questions, coin the slogan and YOU could take part in the contest to win gold each month!  
This offer is open from March to April.  
You can reply on this page, on a photocopy of it, or even handwrite your response on a piece of paper.  
Mail your entries to PO Box 9049, Banani, Dhaka -1213 by March 27th, 1999.

**PLAYERS GOLD LEAF**  
**A TASTE APART**

Answer the following by ticking the correct box:

1. Is John Player Gold Leaf the largest selling international cigarette brand in Bangladesh?  Yes  No
2. Is the man on the John Player Gold Leaf pack a sailor?  Yes  No
3. Does a pack of John Player Gold Leaf have the international seal of quality from British American Tobacco?  Yes  No

And, fill in the following in not more than 8-10 words: John Player Gold Leaf is my favourite cigarette because \_\_\_\_\_

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ AGE: \_\_\_\_\_  
ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_  
OCCUPATION: \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_ SMOKER - YES/NO \_\_\_\_\_

Terms and Regulations:  
1. This offer is open to all persons aged 18 and over.  
2. There is no cash prize, but you will receive a gold cigarette pack.  
3. The contest ends on the 31st of March, 1999 at 12:00 PM (Bangladesh Time).  
4. The contest is open to all countries.  
5. The contest is open to all cigarette brands.  
6. The contest is open to all cigarette brands.  
7. The contest is open to all cigarette brands.  
8. The contest is open to all cigarette brands.  
9. The contest is open to all cigarette brands.  
10. The contest is open to all cigarette brands.

Advertisement appearing in a Bangladesh newspaper promoting BAT's "Voyage of discovery" by the racing yacht John Player Gold Leaf—the only known sailing boat to advertise two cigarette brands at the same time.



*The well known Hindi actress, Ms Shabana Azmi, and two scenes from a film based upon the real life story of Santokben Jadeja, a woman from Gujarat who is currently a Member of the Legislative Assembly of India, and who comes from the traditional Mehr community where her smoking would be strictly taboo. Ms Azmi herself is considered the most socially conscious and socially active Hindi film actress — no better role model could have been found for introducing Indian women to smoking.*

chased away from Sri Lanka's shores. Anti-tobacco banners were reportedly displayed at almost all police stations and schools, and at many road junctions in the city. Picketing and demonstrations took place at schools until the police chief of the province took the precaution of stopping them, in case any got out of control. Meanwhile a float in the form of a ship, decorated with skeletons and satirical anti-tobacco slogans, toured the city and visited schools.

Twenty years ago, the majority of cigarette promotion by transnational tobacco companies in developing countries was in the form of regular advertisements on billboards and in newspapers and magazines. The ads were relatively simple in design, and typically for cheap, local brands. Nowadays, tobacco promotion has become much more homogenised all over the world, with a large proportion being via sponsorship and brand stretching, and regular advertising has become more sophisticated. And exploiting the ever increasing reach and audience of transnational media, especially via television, the companies are tending to concentrate on international brands, using sponsorship and other internationally coordinated promotional techniques. BAT's "Voyage of discovery" illustrates these changes, which pose an increasing challenge for national governments and the international health community.

But the Sri Lanka episode illustrates something else, too, which gives cause for optimism. BAT cannot have foreseen the difficulties encountered in Galle. Even if its marketing executives had considered the possibility, they would no doubt have brushed it aside with the usual arrogant industry talk about there still being a decade or so of "an open play-

ing field"—in other words, no serious resistance from the health side. It is heartening to see that the supplies required by health in the war against tobacco—information about the epidemic, and the skills for using it—are now being efficiently distributed in developing countries, and people are coming out to fight.

## India: movie shoots at women

In the early days of the spread of cigarette smoking, there must have come a point in the United States, Britain, and other industrialised countries when tobacco executives woke up and realised they were missing out on half the market. As many as half the men, or even more, were smoking, but it was not considered "nice" for women to smoke. The taboo said that smoking was a sign of women being "fast" and disreputable. One result of this revelation was the appearance of advertisements, of varying degrees of subtlety, showing that even nice women, often pictured as part of a happy, secure married couple, were beginning to smoke. Helped by social changes accelerated by the second world war, tobacco companies managed to eradicate the taboo, before going on to associate their products as a symbol, even an accessory, of the increasing social liberation and emancipation of women.

Despite the familiarity of this aspect of western social history, it is still deeply shocking to see exactly the same process being repeated now in developing countries. Less than 10 years ago, delegates at a health conference in Africa could hardly believe their eyes when shown a videotape of a BAT ad from comparatively liberal

Kenya, showing women being offered cigarettes by their menfolk, and smoking them. Now the same assault on the taboo of women smoking is beginning to be seen in more strongly traditional India.

Last July, a row blew up in India over the evidently desperate attempts by a movie producer to stop the censor's scissors from cutting out scenes of smoking by the heroine from a new Hindi film "Godmother". As the title suggests, the film is about a woman whose husband is an underworld boss. Among other bad influences on her, he introduces his wife to smoking. When the husband is murdered, the woman, despite being illiterate, decides to take over his business. How to convince the male dominated world that she is every bit as competent as any man? By smoking. She smokes when she is under stress, she smokes when she is happy, and she even smokes in front of her young son. Most of the other characters seem to smoke, too; in fact, smoking, especially by the heroine, is apparently a central theme interwoven throughout the film. BAT's international brand State Express 555 is clearly visible in at least two scenes.

The film was based upon the real life story of Santokben Jadeja, a woman from Gujarat who is currently a Member of the Legislative Assembly of India, who comes from the traditional Mehr community, where her smoking would be strictly taboo. The film makers had evidently gone to great lengths to research and realistically portray the culture, traditions and beliefs of the community—except for the smoking, together with drinking and bad language shown in some scenes.

Before the film's general release, Ms Jadeja filed a case of defamation

against the film producers; apart from smoking, drinking and swearing being taboo for Mehr women, she said that she herself had never indulged in any of these activities. The court issued an order preventing the release of the film. Stung by the financial implications, the film director, together with the well known Hindi actress portraying the Jadeja character, Ms Shabana Azmi, and her husband, a renowned poet, set off for Gujarat to try to placate Ms Jadeja. Their first attempt failed, but somehow the deadlock was eventually broken; perhaps the resources of the world's second largest tobacco company had something to do with it. In any case, compromises must have been made, not least by Ms Azmi. She is recognised as by far the most socially conscious and socially active Hindi film actress, was nominated as a member of the upper house of the Indian parliament for a five year term, and has made a celebrated and widely aired advertisement about AIDS. All in all, tobacco companies could not have a better role model for introducing Indian women to smoking.

India's film making capital Mumbai (formerly Bombay) is reputedly the world's largest movie market. "Bollywood", as film folk call it (now perhaps more appropriately "Mollywood") is merely following the traditions pioneered by its US mentor. With spiralling production costs and increasing difficulties to raise the money for movies, commercial interests have got an eager partner for the promotion of their products. As the federal and state governments show greater interest in the control of regular tobacco advertising, tobacco is bound to be among the greatest beneficiaries of the trend. As they say in show business, this one will run and run.

## Czech Republic: Gauloises dates for students

As students returned to their places of education after the long summer vacation last autumn, some of them must have been pleasantly surprised to be presented with a useful gift to help organise both their studies and their social life during the coming academic year: an attractive, pocket sized "Student's diary". The donor, a company called DownTown based in the capital, Prague, had organised the production of the free diary, a previously unknown concept to Czech students, whose requirements are normally met by a publication prepared and sold every year by each faculty.



*A "student diary" distributed free in the Czech Republic, bearing advertising for the Gauloises cigarette brand, Gauloises Blondes, both on the cover and on all the top right hand pages within the diary. Opposition from medical faculty members at universities in Prague and Brno managed to limit the distribution of these diaries.*

But despite DownTown's intentions, not all students received the gift. Members of staff at Masaryk University in the southern city of Brno noticed that the top of all the right-hand pages of the diary was adorned with a coloured band showing the logo of the French cigarette brand Gauloises Blondes. In addition, each coloured band carried, alternately, a quotation from a famous person, or the brand's name. Appalled by the temerity of the scheme,

Masaryk's rector, Professor Jirí Zlatuska, immediately ordered that no students in any faculty of the university should receive the diaries, and called a press conference for later the same day. Staff members ensured that the diary was not distributed to students, and alerted their colleagues at other schools in Brno and at medical faculties in other parts of the country, as well as alerting colleagues overseas, and a flood of protests poured in.

It turned out that DownTown had previously contacted the university, saying it was preparing the diary, and offering to include appropriate information about the university; but it had omitted to mention that the diary would be distributed free, or that it was sponsored by a tobacco company. Despite a personal visit from DownTown's Brno representative (who got off to a bad start by complaining about the row that had been stirred up), the rector remained firm. He added that if the company found other ways to get the diaries into the hands of his students, he would launch a campaign against Gauloises, using posters from the French national anti-tobacco campaign. The strength of his stand seems to have helped convince the company to back off, though it did not stop it from posting staff in the streets near individual faculty buildings, offering the diaries to passers by including, of course, numerous students. In a more-in-than-sorrow-than-in-anger tone, it later said it accepted the rector's decision, while declaring its extreme surprise at the rejection of such a generous offer. Adverse publicity had apparently been a major factor in the climb down. Its "offer" was also spurned by other educational establishments in Brno, and thanks to the efforts of medical faculty staff, in Prague's Charles university.

While these victories were welcome news to the public health community, DownTown is known to have pursued similar efforts elsewhere, and presumably met with success in some of them. In Brno alone, it had approached the widest range of educational institutions, including technical high schools, a military academy, a university of forestry and agriculture, and an academy of art. Advertising is a relatively new phenomenon in the Czech Republic, and most people have little awareness about it how it works, presenting an added difficulty for those trying to protect public health. Medical faculty staff at Masaryk described how students had not seen the diary as much of an issue, not least because they thought advertising could not influence their own behaviour. In an unfortunate echo of tobacco industry propaganda, some even said the health warning (a small, dull block of text at the side of each Gauloises panel) offered a positive message about not smoking, especially as most were unaware that Gauloises was a cigarette. And the idea of a free diary was not unwelcome to students whose limited funds are needed for the basic necessities of life.

Nevertheless, whatever gains Gauloises made, the resistance that this cigarette promotion encountered, as

with BAT's fiasco in Sri Lanka, shows that tobacco companies can no longer rely on the factor they used to dub so cynically the "open playing field" in countries that are now their priority targets.

## Australia: Philip Morris exploits SIDS research

The world's largest tobacco company, Philip Morris, came under fire once again towards the end of last year, this time for listing itself in a corporate promotional brochure as sponsoring the Red Nose Day Foundation, Australia's largest research charity supporting research on sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS). Sleeping in the prone position and exposure to tobacco smoke are the two most important, known risk factors for SIDS. The glossy brochure, resplendent with photographs of the company's products including cigarettes, identified the charity as among "recipients of support or sponsorship from Philip Morris and its operating companies in Australia". Red Nose Day organisers are believed to have obtained, for fundraising purposes, two giant bars of Toblerone chocolate from Philip Morris's Kraft corporate arm, not realising the connection with the tobacco parent company.

On learning from tobacco control advocates that Philip Morris was using the Toblerone donation as part of its efforts to promote its corporate image, the executive director of the foundation, Ms Kaarene Fitzgerald, complained that its name and cause had been misused and announced that the money raised would be returned as unwanted to Philip Morris.

World wide Philip Morris has aggressively disputed evidence that environmental tobacco smoking is harmful. Anne Jones, director of Action on Smoking and Health (Australia) commented that Philip Morris claiming to support SIDS research was "about as offensive as Slobodan Milosovic donating to Kosovo refugee relief".

SIMON CHAPMAN  
*Editor*

## Litigation: a tobacco lawyer's view

Tobacco was on the menu in Geneva, Switzerland last October, when around 30 high powered lawyers gathered at the Hotel Metropole, not far from the headquarters of the World

Health Organization. It was the monthly meeting of the Association of International Business Lawyers, and the speaker was Bruce Ventura of the US (now Japanese owned) tobacco giant RJ Reynolds. His topic was "Smoking and health litigation", a review of the industry's legal headaches past and present.

After giving a brief history of US tobacco litigation, Mr Ventura reviewed the main categories of litigation: individual cases, class actions, and health care cost recovery actions. He saw three distinct waves of litigation, from personal injury cases up to the late 1960s, through product liability and "failure to warn" cases in the decade beginning in the early 1980s, to the class actions and health care recovery actions of today. As he saw it, the difficulty in the first phase of proving causation, and the reluctance of jurors to make awards for injuries that were the result of an individual's behaviour, led plaintiffs' lawyers to concentrate in the second phase on focusing jurors' attention on the industry's behaviour. Summarising the first two phases of individual cases as industry success, he repeated the boast that despite some adverse trial judgements, the industry had never lost a case on appeal, nor had "ever paid a centime" in damages.

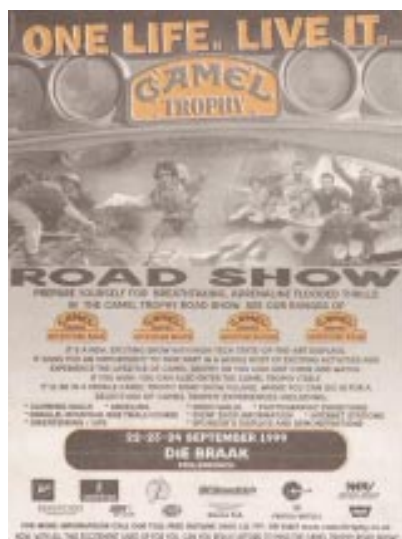
With regard to the successful US flight attendants' case, Mr Ventura said the industry had settled to encourage a congressional deal, but this was now seen as a mistake. Similarly, the industry had offered a \$350 billion settlement deal to Congress as a "Stop the madness!" tactic, but the counter proposal by Congress of a \$500 billion deal and limited pre-emption of future liability had been the cause of the settlement's failure. The industry had settled the cases brought by state attorneys general, however, for "political and stock price" reasons. And politics featured large in the rest of the talk: the US federal government's suit claiming \$25 billion annual health care costs was "highly political . . . probably unconstitutional and . . . an attempt to avoid congressional oversight and approval".

Speaking of the class action suits started in other countries around the world, the industry saw these as "copy cat" efforts to emulate what Mr Ventura called the US "El Dorado". But if any of the foreign health care recovery suits succeeded, he told his audience to watch out for "the deluge". In summary, the industry sees the situation as politicised and volatile, with the US government's suit likely to encourage more private suits. If a single multi-billion dollar

suit succeeded, said Mr Ventura, it could bankrupt the tobacco industry. Doubtless, many readers of *Tobacco Control* would wish every success to all those working on such suits.

## South Africa: one life, waste it!

As South Africa struggles to improve the health of its people with grossly inadequate resources, one of the most precocious forms of tobacco promotion is providing highly attractive imagery for RJ Reynolds' Camel cigarette brand. Under the slogan "ONE LIFE. LIVE IT", newspaper advertisements for the Camel Road Show, like the website to which they refer, must break records for the sheer exuberance of words and images conveying associations of excitement, physical fitness, fun, and other positive concepts. New, exciting (twice), high tech state-of-the-art, opportunity, lifestyle, excitement—these adjectives were just the start. At the show itself, which the ads promised could be found at a mobile Camel Trophy road show village, the reader would find "a selection of Camel Trophy experiences" including climbing walls, abseiling, video walls, photographic exhibitions, a parallel mountain bike trials course, internet stations, and orienteering/GPS (global positioning system) activities. These are at the very furthest end of the spectrum from what is attainable for a smoker suffering from, say, emphysema or lung cancer, and this paradox is presumably an essential design aspect of the marketing plan.



Advertisement from a South African newspaper, promoting the Camel Trophy road show at which readers can participate in all manner of physically stimulating and challenging activities—provided, of course, they have not succumbed from emphysema or lung cancer as a result of smoking.

At the mobile village you could also find sponsors' information, and many will be surprised by some of the names—BP, Kenwood, Captain Morgan Rum, Decca, even Medical Rescue International (MRI). After a flurry of protests generated by the Tobacco Action Group, BP South Africa announced it was pulling out of the venture—a major victory for health, as had been Land Rover's pullout the previous year. Decca and MRI also indicated that they might reappraise their participation, though initially MRI bought the Camel line that the show was not connected with cigarettes. In response to an enquiry from a surprised customer of an associated health care company, MRI wrote that its association was "with . . . a separate business from the company that produces Camel cigarettes. The Camel Trophy company sells adventure related clothing. Our association is therefore . . . with this company rather than Camel cigarettes". Apart from this being an affront to common sense, there is of course a wealth of evidence to prove the link, of which one of *Tobacco Control's* favourites is that reported by a health advocate who met a group of Camel Trophy organisers on a flight to South America. These macho men, wearing jungle gear liberally adorned with the Camel name and logo, were off to the Amazon. When asked whether the Camel Trophy had anything to do with the cigarette brand, they replied that they were, well, *instructed* to say that they were promoting boots and outdoor wear, not cigarettes. They added, however, with a grin on their undoubtedly manly faces, that the similarity with the cigarette brand was, er, not coincidental.

## It's true. It kills. It's great!

You are in a restaurant. It is a smart place, obviously very prosperous, and vast. The clientele is truly international—you can see men and women from every corner of the world. Waiters are going around the tables cheerfully pressing the *spécialités de maison* on the customers, especially the large numbers of Africans, Asians, and Latin Americans down at the far end of the room, and also, you note, on a newly arrived party from Central and Eastern Europe. But wait. One of the proprietors, an American, seems to be having a serious talk with a group of his fellow countrymen sitting near the door. Quietly, you go to the edge of the group to hear what he is saying.

"It's really great to see you folks," he says, "and we're so pleased to be able to take care of you again. But first there's something I want to mention tonight: the food is poisonous. It won't necessarily kill you, though the medical folk say that if you keep on eating here, there's a fifty-fifty chance. And even if it doesn't actually kill you, they say it could still make you very ill and disabled. You remember all that scare stuff in the press about food poisoning in the restaurants on this street? And how all the restaurateurs have always denied it? Well, in this place, we've decided to come clean. It's only right, and you'll find that as a company, we've really changed lately. Sure, we were less than frank in the past, but things are different now. We have the public interest at heart. About the poison, we've put all the details on a website, so those of you with home computers can check it out at your leisure. But it's all a matter of risk and what you, as adults, choose to eat, and we hope you will choose to eat here for many years to come. Take care, enjoy your meal, and have a nice day!"

Some of the American customers begin to put their coats on and quit the place; others say they will stay around this time but maybe decide later about whether to come back or not. But while the waiters up this end of the room do not seem to be pushing the food quite so hard, what you most notice is that elsewhere they are swarming around more than ever. They are telling the foreign customers that this dish is the one that really fashionable people are eating these days, and that one is what all the sports stars go for. And as for women who want to be glamorous and independent, the chef's new sweet (it's for the slim, modern woman, made only with "lite" synthetic cream) can really help them make a statement about themselves.

This scenario is, of course, pure fantasy, but a parallel one involving the Philip Morris company is not. In mid October last year, Philip Morris announced that it believed there was "an overwhelming medical and scientific consensus that cigarette smoking causes lung cancer, heart disease, emphysema, and other serious diseases in smokers". It placed this admission on its corporate website, under the Health Issues for Smokers section. The admission was well publicised, albeit briefly, in the United States and elsewhere in the west, but apparently received little coverage in the developing world.

Breathtaking audacity? Perhaps, but when one considers the small proportion of its customers, real or potential,



Cartoon strip run by Philip Morris Polska in a popular Polish TV guide.

who might get as far as reading the website or those genuine health sites to which it is hyperlinked, it begins to look more like a straightforward business decision. In the United States, President Clinton said: "This formal acknowledgement comes far too late, but still we must all welcome it". While he went on to repeat his view that tobacco companies should answer for their actions in court, and stop marketing to children, it was at least a partial softening in his tone. *The Financial Times* (UK), however, saw Philip Morris's move simply as part of a strategy to head off "juror rage" and to reposition itself in order to fend off attempts to bring in more regulation. But what really matters is whether the company changes its behaviour abroad, especially in developing countries, where access to the web is small and restricted. After limited coverage of the admissions, there have been no reports of changed marketing practices, nor of local press initiatives to draw foreign smokers' attention to the admissions. Far from that, some of Philip Morris's overseas operations seem to be doing their best to distance themselves from them. In the Czech newspaper *Lidové Noviny*, Dagmar Staroveska, of Tabak, a.s., 77.6% of which is owned by Philip Morris, was quoted as saying: "It is the position of the American company, not of our company." And if Philip Morris's record on promotion is anything to go by, it would be almost as dangerous as smoking to hold ones' breath waiting for any change in practice to follow the admissions on disease. The section on marketing of the unctuously self righteous Philip Morris website declares: "The company will not use cartoon characters in its advertisements or promotions." However, just a few months before the disease admissions, Philip Morris Polska, the company's Polish subsidiary, was running a cartoon strip ad in a popular TV guide with a circulation of around two million readers, and no doubt the same high proportion of child readers

that TV guides have everywhere. No, this is a company of strategy, not change.

## UK: no cigarette under the stiff upper lip

Staff of the British Foreign and Commonwealth, traditionally reputed to be inscrutable and wily operators when posted to embassies overseas, may have been more secretive than their American colleagues about supporting their country's tobacco interests, but apparently in many cases they were no less active. So a logical development in Britain's espousal of a broadly health driven policy on tobacco was to stop them backing the tobacco industry in any way.

Anyone knowing how these diplomatic "mandarins" work will understand the potential difficulties of changing their rule book, so the news last year that they had been instructed to stop their support of tobacco was as surprising as it was welcome. Following similar measures pioneered by the US government, British embassy staff are no longer allowed to promote, endorse or advise tobacco companies in overseas operations, and are forbidden to attend parties or promotional events hosted by the companies. For the tobacco companies that once appeared to be so thoroughly sheltered by the commercial and political establishment, another small but significant tile has fallen off the roof.

## Holy smoke!

Some years ago, a British physician visiting a hospital in southern Africa found a heavy smoking patient making hand rolled cigarettes from the pages of old copies of medical journals thrown out by the hospital library. The lightweight paper of *The New England Journal of Medicine* was his preferred choice, apparently, though *The Lancet* came a close second. Now we hear a

similar tale, this time involving a Christian missionary who, on arrival at his new parish in the same part of the world, was delighted to find many people stopping him and, unprompted, asking whether he could get them a copy of the Holy Bible. And yes, it was with regret that a more experienced colleague took him aside to explain that the bibles sent out by missionary societies in the UK were highly rated by some of the local men for the ultra fine paper of their pages.

## Hong Kong: down at the fair

On October 27-29 last year, Hong Kong was host to the World Tobacco International Tobacco Symposium and Trade Fair. Oddly enough, few Hong Kong newspapers paid much attention to "the event for everyone in tobacco", except for two pro-Beijing organs *Wen Wei Po* and *Ta Kung Pao* which, presumably with encouragement from the industry, gave full coverage over three days.

The symposium president Jiang Chengkang, deputy director of the China State Tobacco Monopoly, delivered a mainly bland assessment of the status of 400 year old China tobacco. He saw, at the least, stability despite the "impact of anti-smoking propaganda" and the possibility of growth as young people in coastal areas and medium to large cities increase their consumption of blended type cigarettes. In his view, the achievements in the last 20 years included "rejuvenating (the) tobacco industry with science and education . . . a complete scientific development and popularisation system, quality supervision . . . and the tobacco educational system including colleges, technical secondary schools and training centres . . .".

However, Ooi Wei Ming, managing director of BAT China, was more focused on the challenges of "low market growth and . . . continuing long term decline exacerbated by an increasingly dark business, legal and regulatory landscape". He identified the Tobacco Free Initiative as the biggest challenge "because it brings the spectre of global tobacco control frighteningly close . . . The WHO, in its Framework Convention . . . seeks to deny access to a legal product enjoyed by hundreds of millions of adult smokers . . . the implication is that we . . . don't take our social and economic responsibilities seriously, that we aren't capable of self regulation and need to be nannied by governments . . . We know this is not the case . . . it is time to push back . . . to make our case in a compelling way".

“BAT . . . is taking the lead in dealing with these very public issues . . . and we believe in doing this in a responsible way . . . Our vision is an environment where we work in partnership with all our (sic) stakeholders—including those we perceive as our adversaries—to promote mutual understanding benefit and interest. As an example of this, we have been actively seeking to cooperate with global organisations like the WHO on issues such as youth smoking prevention . . . we have sponsored such programmes in partnership with China’s State Tobacco Society and Soong Ching Ling Foundation. Is this not socially responsible behaviour?” Other good works rattled off by Mr Ooi included an afforestation programme in Cambodia and sponsorship of academic scholarships for outstanding tertiary students in Malaysia. “Is this not contributing to economic well being and “giving back” (sic) to the communities in which we live and work?”

The formation of partnerships in the community was picked up by Ellis Woodward, vice president for corporate affairs of Philip Morris Asia Ltd. He thought that “Any number of public issues have the potential to derail industry’s ability to effectively manage the public environment. But . . . the single greatest threat is . . . youth smoking . . . Concern about youth smoking is not just a fad or a passing phenomenon . . . And we in the industry share that concern”. Mr Woodward felt there was some good news, however, “that our industry has been—and can be—on the right side. We agree with our critics and with the general public that kids should not smoke,” adding that they have made good progress on youth smoking in Asia.

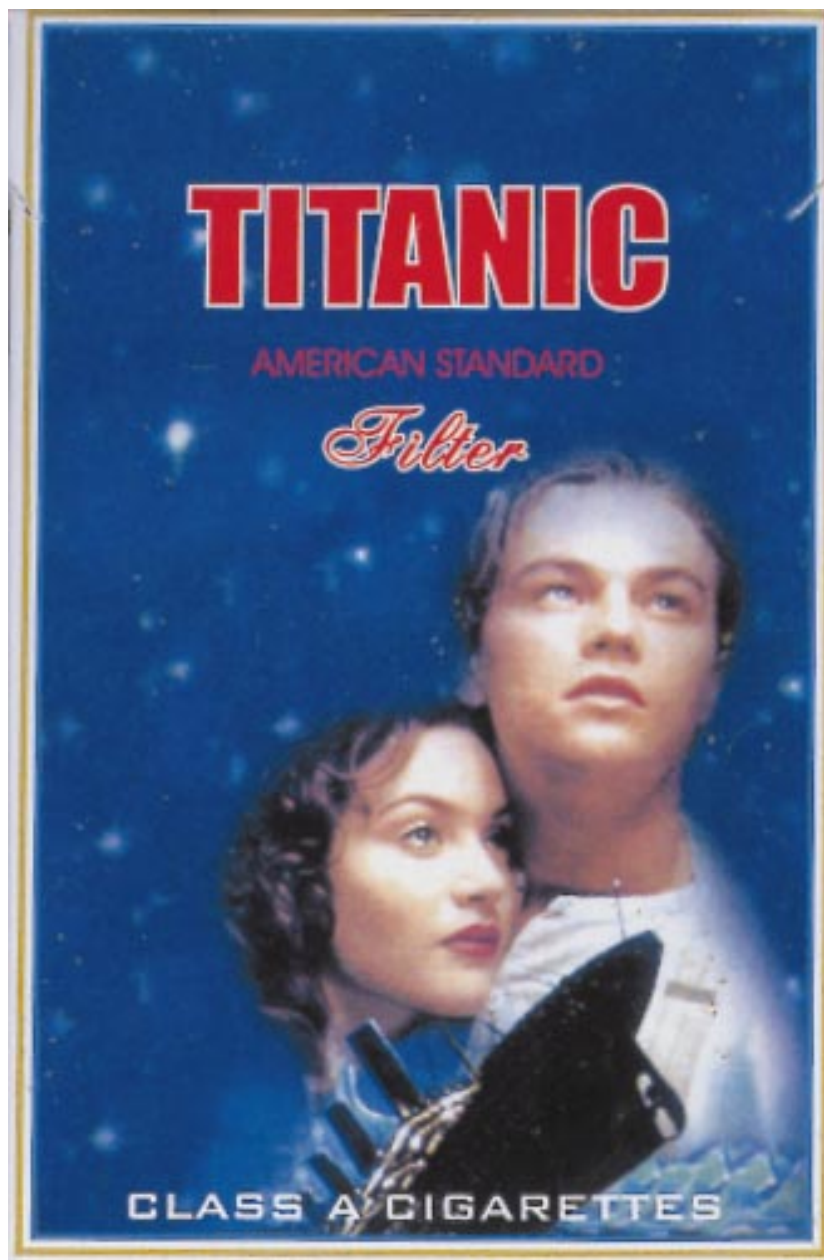
These youth smoking activities included: a radio campaign in Hong Kong; anti-youth (sic) access programmes in Korea, Singapore, Malaysia, and Pakistan; a marketing code in the Philippines; an “unprecedented partnership between the industry and Tapei City government in Taiwan led by the very popular Mayor of Taipei”; in Indonesia and India “the industry is pulling together to get those (minimum age) laws on the books”; and in Japan, Australia, and New Zealand “a variety of youth smoking prevention programmes”.

“Youth smoking prevention . . . is a shining example of why we must reach out when we do share the same goals as our critics and society at large . . . We believe that by taking these actions we can avoid the same mistakes we made in the United States . . . Our company is committed in Asia, in the US, and in every corner

of the world . . . to retaining, and where necessary, rebuilding and resuming what we believe is our rightful place in society . . .”

Woodward stated that “the general public in Asia is not ‘out to get’ tobacco companies”. His carefully crafted anthology contains many powerful word bites that will predictably impress Asian business people (in chambers of commerce), legislators, and civil servants. They

present a real and immediate challenge to tobacco control advocates in the Asia Pacific region. These redefinitions of the industry’s persona in Asia were followed by a candid account by Brenda Chow (BAT) of how the Tobacco Institute cosied up to the Hong Kong government’s Finance Bureau and secured a freeze on tobacco duty increases in 1998-99 and aims to do the same for 1999-2000. But that is another story.



*Vietnamese tobacco companies are not cooling their heels in pursuit of the local teenage market. The Saigon Cigarette Factory’s Boy, the Vinaso Tobacco JV Company’s Rave (manufactured under the authority of Net Corp, USA), and the HTF company’s Titanic all sink to new lows. The Titanic pack shows Leonardo DiCaprio and Kate Winslet looking wistfully into the fog as the Titanic goes bottom up. With Vietnam being the world’s capital for unauthorised copying of designer goods, software and CDs, the stars’ images are almost certainly being used without their permission. In May 1999, pop icon Robbie Williams was angered to find that his photo was being used unauthorised by BAT to promote Benson & Hedges in a music supplement in Sri Lanka. An unrepentant BAT trotted out the usual nonsense about sponsorship having nothing to do with selling cigarettes. We can almost hear the Vietnamese company explaining that the Titanic imagery is in fact an effort to warn smokers of their impending doom. Tobacco Control challenges DiCaprio and Winslet to follow Williams’ lead in condemning their exploitation. Simon Chapman, Editor.*