

# DAWN

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## Tobacco control delayed

IN Pakistan, where the majority of the population is illiterate, only text-based health warnings are printed on cigarette packs.

It is the responsibility of the government to ensure that the public is well informed of the hazardous affects of tobacco use.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has recommended that warnings containing both pictures and words should be printed on cigarette packs because they are the most effective at convincing peo-

ple to quit and reduce tobacco use.

The government of Pakistan signed the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control in 2004 where it agreed to incorporate effective health warnings into the domestic legislation.

After the latest relaxation allowed to the tobacco industry, picture-based warnings will now appear with effect from May 31, 2010, rather than the delayed Feb 1, 2010 deadline, and the earlier Jan 1, 2010 deadline an-

nounced on the occasion of World No Tobacco Day, May 31, 2009.

It shows that the ministry of health has again delayed introduction of pictorial warnings on cigarette packs and the tobacco industry has influenced decision makers to stall the decision.

Ever since May 31, 2009, the Tobacco industry in Pakistan has demanded extension of the deadline for printing of pictorial health warnings on cigarette packs and exhaustion of the current stock from the market.

This action by the legislature and the government would set back the nationwide tobacco-control effort, giving the industry enough time to gain profit in the name of exhaustion of existing stocks from the market.

Tobacco companies are spending more than ever to have their permanent customer base expand for decades, especially where youths are concerned.

In my view, this is the price we are paying for relying on cigarette tax reve-

nue. It is a fact that our country needs the money and our government became a puppet of the industry at the expense of public health.

Yet another deadline of Feb 1 has been missed. I urge the ministry of health to introduce pictorial health warnings on tobacco products urgently.

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