

Foot-dragging against tobacco blitz

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A MULTINATIONAL tobacco company has launched a tobacco advertising campaign in some newspapers in violation of Prohibition of Smoking and Protection of Non-smokers Health Ordinance 2002.

Section 7 of the ordinance restricts tobacco companies from advertising their products.

However, the law is toothless as it entails only a fine of Rs5000, which is peanuts for any tobacco company compared to the millions of rupees being spent by the Philip Morris International tobacco company on their recent promotional spree in Pakistan.

Law enforcement agencies seem to be facilitating the tobacco company, as they remain unwilling to cooperate with those concerned for tobacco's bad effects and invoke the law.

TheNetwork (not a typo) for Consumer Protection has filed an application against the blitz by Philip Morris International (former Lakson Tobacco Company) with the Margalla Police Station.

Jang Sunday Magazine and *Express Tribune Magazine* (November 13), *Newsweek* (13-18 November), and *Herald and Newsline* (November) carried a tobacco ad by the Philip Morris Limited, reads the application submitted by TheNetwork.

The complaint is not just about imposing a petty fine on the advertiser; greater concern is that this blatant violation is undoing what little good was done for tobacco control in Pakistan, said Nadeem Iqbal, Executive Coordinator of TheNetwork, which has been spearheading the tobacco control campaign for around 15 years.

Pakistan assumes legal obligation to ban tobacco advertisements by endorsing the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC); the Article 13 of the FCTC obliges parties to recognise a comprehensive ban on tobacco advertising, promotion, and

Govt serves notice on advertiser

THE Tobacco Control Cell has sent an explanation notice to a tobacco giant for getting published advertisements in national dailies and magazines in violation of anti-tobacco rules.

The cell has directed the Philip Morris International Pakistan to submit a written reply in seven day of the receipt of this letter under the relevant law, says a press statement issued Saturday. — Online

sponsorship to reduce the consumption of tobacco products.

Civil society members while lodging the complaint strongly protested against the company and the government for violating the tobacco control law and invited media to join hands with them by participating and highlighting the event.

Australia has passed the plain tobacco-packaging bill, which is also an example for Pakistan to adopt, protesters demanded.

Although Pakistan introduced tobacco control policies prior to recognising the FCTC, lack of political will to prioritise tobacco control and vigorous promotional campaigns by wily tobacco industry remain stumbling blocks in the way of effective implementation of tobacco control laws in Pakistan.

Police are faltering to register an FIR. They have forwarded the complaint to the legal branch of the federal police, seeking their opinion if a First Information Report (FIR) can be registered or not.

Contacted, Aasma Qamer, Communication Officer at TheNetwork, said, "We still feel police or court of law may try to delay the issue since PM1 is more powerful than many governments. Further, the law imposes a petty fine of Rs5000 while the



ON A MISSION: Officials of TheNetwork for Consumer Protection and citizens lodging a complaint against Phillip Morris International tobacco company. — Dateline photo by Sohail Shahzad

company has spent millions of rupees on a mere advertisement in print media."

Talking to *Dateline*, SHO Margalla Police Station Irshad Abro said they would register an FIR if the legal branch allowed them.

Former Secretary General of Islamabad District Bar Association, Advocate Riasat Ali Azad said that whenever police do not want to register the case they just forward the application to legal branch in order to delay the

process. Legal opinion tactics are also used to get time for a patch-up. It is a very important issue and police should not delay it.

Director General of Tobacco Control Cell Dr Asad said to *Dateline* he was informed about the advertising campaign of the company, due to which on his instructions a notice had been served to Philip Morris International. The company has been instructed to reply within seven days and

action will be taken against Phillip Morris International in view of their reply.

He admitted that according to the law, advertisements were a clear violation of the rules and strict action should be taken against them.

The spokesman of World Health Organization (WHO) in Pakistan, Shahzad Alam could not be contacted because his cell was not responding.