PUBLIC HEALTH ON TOP

Unveiling Tobacco Industry Strategies to Combat Tobacco Epidemic in Bangladesh
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First Published
December, 2013

Written by
Monwar Hossein, Md. Hasan Shahriar, Md. Shahedul Alam

Edited by
Taifur Rahman, ABM Zubair

Photo and Media
KH. Hashibuzzaman

Translation and Research
H. M. Al Imran Khan and Mohammad Wali Noman

Administration and Finance
Md. Abul Kalam Azad and Meherun Nessa

Office Support
Md. Shihab Uddin

Cover
Razib Roy

Design
Kazi Nazmul Hasan Rasel

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Publisher
PROGGA
House 6, Main Road 3, Block A, Section 11, Mirpur, Dhaka 1216.
Phone: +88-02-9005553
Fax: +88-02-8060751
Email: progga.bd@gmail.com
Website: www.progga.org

Published with support from Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids (CTFK) and Bloomberg Philanthropies.

Distributor
Pearl Publications
38/2, Banglabazar, Dhaka- 1100.

We wish to extend our thanks to Ellen Feighery, Sean Rudolph, Vandana Shah with Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids and Anti Tobacco Media Alliance (ATMA) for their support and advice.

ISBN: 978-984-33-7352-6
Dedication

Mahatab Uddin Chowdhury, the premature soul, journalist and Anti Tobacco Media Alliance (ATMA) member.
Foreword

Deaths caused by tobacco are not acceptable. In Bangladesh, 57 thousand people die and about 400 thousand become disabled due to tobacco every year. If the current trend of tobacco-related deaths continues, the annual death toll will reach 10 million by 2030, out of which seven (07) million will be in developing countries like Bangladesh, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). Every citizen of a state has the right to get protection from this tobacco epidemic, and at the same time, the states and the governments are also responsible for protecting public health by preventing damages caused by these deaths and disabilities. Accordingly, Bangladesh signed the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) in 2003 and enacted 'Smoking and Tobacco Products Usages (Control) Act, 2005'. However, the Act could not play effective role in tobacco control due to some loopholes and that is why initiative to amend the Act was taken in 2009. Going through numerous ups and downs, the Bill for amendment of the Act was passed on April 29, 2013 and came in force through a government gazette on May 02, 2013. However, the tobacco industry adopted many tactics to impede the amendment and is still working to hinder implementation of important sections of the Act (e.g. pictorial health warnings). In addition, the industry's ploy continues to prevent effective taxation on tobacco products. We have seen these tactics even before the budget of the current fiscal year (2013-14). The tobacco industry knows very well that effective tobacco tax policy and its implementation can reduce the tobacco business to a great extent. Unfortunately, the tobacco manufacturers very tactfully utilize lawmakers,
বাবহার করে থাকে। রাজনীতির সরল হিসাব দেখিয়ে অথবা কর্মসংস্থানের ভূমিকা পরিস্ফুটন করে তারা জনপ্রতিনিধিদের সহায়তাতে আদায় করে থাকে।

তামাক কোম্পানির হস্তক্ষেপ ও কুটকুলেশ উন্মুক্তের ইতিহাস বাংলাদেশে খুবই সামাজিক। বিশেষ করে, তামাক নিয়ন্ত্রণ আইন সংশোধন ও তামাকে বর্ধিত করার ক্ষেত্রে তামাকবিবাহী সংগঠনগুলোর ধারাবাহিক দৃঢ় অবস্থানের কারণে এ ধরনের হস্তক্ষেপ ক্রমশ স্পষ্ট হতে থাকে। সঙ্গতি কারণেই তামাক কোম্পানির হস্তক্ষেপ ও কুটকুলেশ সম্পর্কে আমাদের জানানো হয়ে আসামানা, যা কেবল পুলিশ করেবেই প্রকাশযোগ্য। তবে শত্রুর পরিসেবে হলেও পুলিশের কার্যক্ষেত্রে বাংলাদেশে তামাকের বাবহার, তামাকের সাহায্য ও অন্যান্য ক্ষেত্র, তামাকের বাজার ও অধিনায়কতা, তামাক কোম্পানিটির উচ্চারণ ও হস্তক্ষেপ, তামাক নিয়ন্ত্রণ এবং হস্তক্ষেপের মোকাবেলায় রাষ্ট্রীয় বাধাবাধকতা প্রকৃতি বিষয়গুলো সংরক্ষিত হয়েছে, যা তামাক-বিবাহী কর্মক্ষেত্রে নিবেদিত সমক্ষে চালান তামাক সমাজের নিয়ন্ত্রণ আদেশের বস্তু লোকার্থ।

একইসাথে এটি আমাদের নীতিনির্দেশক ও জনপ্রতিনিধিদের মাঝে ‘জনযোগ্য সরার উপরে’ এই নিয়মিত সত্য উপলব্ধি ও আচরণকে কার্যকর ভূমিকা গ্রহণ সহায়তা হবে আমাদের বিশ্বাস। সর্বোপরি, আমাদের এ দুর্দান্ত প্রয়োজন ও রূপকল্পকে দৃষ্টান্ত করে তামাক কোম্পানির হস্তক্ষেপ ও কুটকুলেশ উন্মুক্তের প্রয়োজন হোক যেন আমাদের আশ্বাস দেয়। আমাদের বাজার পরিসরে সমস্ত সুরক্ষায় নীতিনির্দেশকের সংশ্লিষ্ট সকলকে কার্যকর তামাক নিয়ন্ত্রণ নীতি প্রণয়ন ও বাস্তবায়নে সহায়তা করবে।

The history of unveiling tobacco industry interferences and tactics is quite new in Bangladesh. The consistently strong tobacco control movement for law amendment and tobacco taxation brought the tobacco industry interferences in daylight. As a result, we do not have a lot of information about the tobacco industry tactics in Bangladesh context. The limited extent of information we have can be described only in a small book. Yet, in this limited scale, the booklet accommodates information on tobacco use in Bangladesh, health and other hazards of tobacco, tobacco market and economics, emergence and interferences of tobacco companies, and state's responsibility to control tobacco use and to combat tobacco industry interferences, which we believe will provide some useful weapons for the tobacco control activists in the country. We also believe that it will help the policymakers realize the fact that 'public health should be on top' and take effective measures accordingly. Hopefully this small initiative of ours will motivate large scale initiatives in the future of exposing tobacco industry interferences, which in turn will help policymakers and other stakeholders in the formulation and implementation of effective tobacco control policies.
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Tobacco use, despite being the largest cause of preventable deaths worldwide, is showing an increasing trend across the globe. The upward trend of tobacco use is also observed in Bangladesh. The burden of losses that tobacco causes is terrible. In Bangladesh, bidi, cigarette, zarda, gul, sadapata etc. are mostly used as tobacco products. By selling the toxic material in the guise of 'product', tobacco industry is making billions of taka every year. As a result, public health is under peril, and country's economy is threatened with a vicious cycle of long term loss. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), the country's total cost of treatment of tobacco-related diseases is twice as much as the revenue from tobacco each year. The scenario is almost same globally. Although tobacco is considered a threat to public health and economy, it did not get proper attention of the policymakers as a 'threat'. Meanwhile, tobacco industry is leading the country to 'tobacco epidemic' through expanding their business.

According to the Global Adult Tobacco Survey (GATS) 2009, 43% adults in Bangladesh use tobacco. Thus, the number of tobacco consumers in the country is more than 40 million. The rate is 29% among women and 58% among men. The rate of using smokeless tobacco among women is more than that among men.
Overall, 27.2% adults (20.59 million) use smokeless tobacco: 28% (10.34 million) of the adult women and 26% (10.25 million) of the adult men. On the other hand, 23% adults use tobacco by smoking, which means the country has 20.19 million smokers. Smoking is much more prevalent among men: 20.12 million adult men and 0.7 million adult women smoke. Unfortunately women become victims of second-hand smoking due to smoking habit of their male counterparts. In Bangladesh, 30% of the adult women are exposed to second-hand smoking at workplaces and 21% of them are exposed at public places. This means around 10 million Bangladeshi women become victims of second-hand smoking without having a single puff on cigarette/bidi. Fifty seven thousand (57,000) people aged 30 or above die annually due to tobacco use and 382,000 more become disable in different ways.

All sorts of tobacco products, smoking or smokeless, are injurious to health. Tobacco causes a number of health hazards and diseases like oral and throat cancer, lung cancer, asthma, ulcer, heart disease, paralysis, chronic respiratory problems, decay of tooth and gum, stillbirth, low birth weight and many more. Tobacco users bear significantly higher risk of lung cancer, oral cancer, throat cancer, stomach cancer compared to non-users. Tobacco is responsible for half of all cancers including 90-95% of lung cancers and 80-90% of

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(1) kotti 25 lakh) দুঃখাবিবশ্বত তামাক বায়ার করেন।
বাংলাদেশ 20% পাঁচবর্ষক মানুষ ধূমপানের মাধ্যমে তামাক
ব্যায়ার করেন। অর্থাৎ দেশে ধূমপানীয় বর্তমানে সংখ্যা 2 কোটি
১৯ লক্ষ। ধূমপানের হার পুরুষের মধ্যে অনেক বেশি; ২ কোটি
১২ লক্ষ পুরুষ এবং ৭ লক্ষ নারী ধূমপান করেন। তবে পুরুষদের
ধূমপানের ফলে নারীদের পরাক্রম ধূমপানের শিকার হলে হার
অনেক বেশি। বাংলাদেশের ৩০% পাঁচবর্ষক নারী কর্মস্থলে এবং
২১% নারী জনসাধারণস্থলে পরাক্রম ধূমপানের শিকার হচ্ছেন।

অর্থাৎ ধূমপান না করেও পরাক্রম ধূমপানের শিকার বাংলাদেশের
প্রায় ১ কোটি নারী। তামাক ব্যবহারের প্রভাব ফল হিসেবে
বাংলাদেশে প্রতি বছর ৩০ বৎসর এর বেশি বয়স্ক জনগোষ্ঠী
মধ্যে ৫৭ হাজার মানুষ মৃত্যুবরণ করেন এবং ৬২ হাজার
মানুষ পুষ্ট বরণ করেন।

ধূমপান ও চর্চায়োগ্য তামাকসহ সব ধরনের তামাকের
শাহ বা জা রাত্রি করিক। তামাক সেবন এর প্রাচীন শাস্ত্রে
ক্ষুদ্রতা হয়। তার মধ্যে অন্যান্য মুখ ও গলার ক্যালস, ফুসফুসের
ক্যালস, হৃৎপানি, আলিপানি, হৃদরোগ, প্রক্রিয়াক (পারালাইজেশন), দীর্ঘকালীন শ্রেষ্ঠত্ব, দাঁত ও মাথার ক্ষয়,
পূর্বস্তার, মৃত শিথ ও কম জন্ম মৃত্যু শিক্ষণ জন্য ব্যাথ।
শাখা তামাক সেবন করেন তারা ফুসফুসের ক্যালস, মুখবন্ধের
ক্যালস, গলালীর ক্যালস, পাক্ষিকতার ক্যালসের ক্ষুদ্রতা বেশি
বহন করেন। শাখা ৯০-৯৫ ভাগ ফুসফুসের ক্যালস, ৮০-
৯০ ভাগ মুখবন্ধের ক্যালসহ মোট ক্যালসের অর্ধেকের জন্য
দাঁত তামাক। বিড়-সিপার্টের ভোজন ৭ হাজারের বেশি
ক্ষতির রাসায়নিক পদ্ধতি রয়েছে, যার মধ্যে ৬০টি ক্যালসের
জন্য দাঁত। বিশ্ব শাহ অঞ্চলে এক গবেষণায় বলা হয়, তামাকের

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A World Lung Foundation poster adapted in Bangla for mass media campaign in Bangladesh
oral cancers. Tobacco smoke contains 7,000 toxic chemicals and at least 69 of them are carcinogenic. According to a study by WHO, tobacco is killing a person in every six (06) seconds. It is anticipated that tobacco will kill 10 million people annually by 2030 and 7 million of them in the third world countries like Bangladesh.

FCTC and Bangladesh

Bangladesh was the first signatory to the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC). Acknowledging the disastrous effects of tobacco, Bangladesh signed the international treaty in 2003. FCTC is the universal tool for bringing the international community together to reduce tobacco use and fight tobacco industry's interferences. At present almost 88% global population living in 177 member states are covered by the protection provided by FCTC. The government of Bangladesh ratified the treaty in 2004, which created international obligation to implement the articles of it. Accordingly, the government enacted the Smoking and 'Tobacco Products Usage (Control) Act, 2005' (amended in 2013), which was a great achievement for tobacco control in Bangladesh. Although the law of 2005 regulated advertisements and promotions of tobacco products to a great extent, it could not stop the tobacco industry activities and other tricky interferences in the tobacco control initiatives of the government. Tobacco
industry continues its direct and indirect interferences in full swing in tobacco control policies including the ones on tobacco farming and taxation of tobacco products. The tobacco companies are continuing their business promotion in the name of corporate social responsibility (CSR) to attract policymakers' attention. The volume of such tricky promotional activities mounted up following strong demands by tobacco control groups to amend the tobacco control law of 2005 and impose high taxes on tobacco in the national budget. Tobacco companies usually plant trees, supply pure drinking water, install solar plants, arrange painting exhibitions of renowned artists and do other such activities only to manipulate the tobacco control initiatives of the government. In contrary, the Article 5.3 of the FCTC, which was included in the treaty to protect tobacco control measures from the interference of tobacco industry, clearly recommends that Parties must protect the tobacco control policies and measures from the commercial and other interests of the tobacco industry. But the tobacco companies are running their activities using the ignorance of the government about FCTC. They are continuously plotting different moves to prevent implementation of FCTC.

**Article 5.3:** In setting and implementing their public health policies with respect to tobacco control, Parties shall act to protect these policies from commercial and other vested interests of the tobacco industry in accordance with national law.

<table>
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<td>No partnerships, non-binding or non-enforceable agreements between tobacco industry and governments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No contributions by tobacco industry to governments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No tobacco industry-drafted legislation or policy or voluntary codes as substitutes for legally enforceable measures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No investments by governments or public officials in tobacco industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No tobacco industry representation on government tobacco control bodies or FCTC delegations</td>
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Tobacco industry interference is "the set of actions that the tobacco industry takes in order to obstruct the design and implementation of a health policy or promote policies or positions that uphold its commercial interests." As part of the interference activities, the tobacco industry always tries to resist tobacco control initiatives both in covert and overt manners and spend the required funds to implement the conspiracies.

It is important to keep in mind that tobacco industry always aims at increasing its profit by any means, and try to obstruct tobacco control policies in order to continue and expand their business smoothly. On the other side, the government is responsible for designing and implementing effective tobacco control policies that should protect public health. Hence, the goals of the government and tobacco industry from public health point of view are conflicting; and thus the tobacco industry should never be considered as a stakeholder of any tobacco control policy, programme or initiative.

Tobacco is the only legal product that kills people. Despite that the tobacco business is legal and tobacco companies across the globe are economically and politically influential because large portions of the world populations are tobacco consumers. Using the economic and political powers,
Tobacco industry’s ploy to undermine tobacco control

Although tobacco companies are death merchants, they enjoy a 'positive corporate image' worldwide for their so-called social responsibilities or CSR activities. Using the CSR label, tobacco companies continue their interference, which is also evidenced by different internal documents of the tobacco companies already made public. Anti-tobacco organizations across the world are pressing the governments to eliminate tobacco industry interference using the revealed documents. At the same time, they encourage the tobacco control advocates to expose the false images of social responsibilities of the tobacco companies.

As transnational companies, they repeat the same strategies internationally to impede adoption and implementation of the tobacco control measures in order to uphold their business interest. The following section presents some notable aspects of tobacco industry interference in different parts of the world (based on various sources and practical experiences from Bangladesh):
রুদ্ধিজীবী ও সুশীল সমাজের প্রতিনিধিদের একত্রিকরণ

প্রতিপক্ষ এবং সমাজের চলাচল ধারা পানাকারভের মধ্যে রুদ্ধিজীবী
ও সুশীল সমাজের প্রতিনিধিদের নিয়ে সভা ও সমিতি আয়োজন

অফিসার্টি চালানো মোকাবিলায় নতুন কর্মকর্তাদল নির্ধারণ

লবিং

নীতি প্রণয়ন নীতিতত্ত্ব হস্তক্ষেপ

তামাক কোম্পানির ব্যবসা সহায়ক নীতি পক্ষে চালানো

আইন সংশোধন বিষয়ে প্রতিবাদ প্রদান

অকার্যকর আইন প্রণয়নে উৎসাহিত করা

রাজনৈতিক চাপ প্রদান

নির্বাচনী প্রচার-প্রচরণের অর্থায়ন

তামাক নিয়ন্ত্রণ নীতিতত্ত্ব চালানো হতায়িত হিসেবে বিভিন্ন
অনুচ্ছেদে বাংলাদেশ এবং অন্যান্য দলিলগুলি বাস্তব

সরকারি কর্মকর্তাদের সহায়তা অর্জনের জন্য সরকারের বিভিন্ন
কার্যক্রমে অর্থায়ন

কার্যকর তামাক নিয়ন্ত্রণ আইনের পরিবর্তে সরকারের সাথে
ব্যক্তিগতভাবে প্রশিক্ষণ দেওয়া

গবেষণার অর্থায়ন, বেজাবার পারামর্শক নির্দেশ

তামাকের পক্ষে তথ্য-উপাত্ত তৈরিতে অর্থায়ন (যেমন: গবেষণা,
গবেষণা প্রতিশ্রুত এমনকি বিশেষভাবে)

প্যাকেজের গবেষণার তথ্য ফলাও করে চালান

তামাকের কর্তিক প্রভাব ও তামাক নিয়ন্ত্রণের অর্থনৈতিক প্রভাব
বিষয়ক তথ্য বিকৃতভাবে উপস্থাপন

তথ্য বিকৃতি করা

তামাক নিয়ন্ত্রণ সরকারের দোষী পদক্ষেপসমূহকে চালানো করা

তামাক নিয়ন্ত্রণ সরকারের পদক্ষেপ দোষীকার নির্দেশিত
করতে নানাকরণ অতিরিক্ত তথ্য চালান পাশাপাশি জনসমক্ষে
তামাক কোম্পানির পক্ষে যুক্তি তুলে ধরা

সাধারণ লোকের জন্য বিভিন্ন ব্যক্তি অফিস ও ব্যবহার

বিভিন্ন ধাতের লোকদের নিয়ে এলায়ন যা ফ্রেট এক্স বাহন,
যেমন: হোটেল-সেবারী হাসিক, খরচি বিক্রেতা, প্রবাসী সংস্থা,
ধূমপানীয় অধিকারের সরকারি বিষয়ক সংঘান, তামাকচারী

তামাক নিয়ন্ত্রণ গুরুত্ব পদক্ষেপসমূহের (যেমন: আইন প্রণয়ন,
তামাকপ্রদু কোর্টের, ইত্যাদি) বিবর্ধিত করার ফেরে একব
গ্রুপে মুখ্য হিসেবে ব্যবহার

মামলা-কর্মকর্ম

তামাক নিয়ন্ত্রণ গুরুত্ব পদক্ষেপসমূহ নূতন রুদ্ধকরণে আইনি লজমী
চালানো

Gather civil society members and scholars

Arrange seminars and meetings with civil society members and scholars to observe the opposition and prevailing social trends

Plan future actions to fight challenges ahead

Lobbying

Interfere on policy making process

Promote pro-tobacco policies

Place law amendment proposals

Encourage formulation of ineffective law

Create Political pressure

Fund electoral campaigns

Use international treaties and documents as tools to challenge tobacco control policies

Sponsor government activities to derive help from government officials

Prioritize voluntary agreements with government in place of effective tobacco control law

Fund research and hire scientific consultants

Fund creation of pro-tobacco facts (sponsor researchers, organizations or universities)

Publicize biased research findings

Twist data on detrimental effects of tobacco on health and economy

Distort information

Challenge the government steps on tobacco control

Discourage government's initiatives on tobacco control by filtered information and defending Tobacco Industry in public

Create and utilize front-groups

Use people of different sectors including restaurant workers, retailers, advertising agencies, smokers' rights associations, tobacco farmers and other such groups as front-groups

Utilize these groups as spokespersons to oppose tobacco control measures like tobacco control law formulation and taxation

Lawsuit

Lodging court cases in order to weaken tobacco control initiatives
হুমকি প্রদান

তামাক নিয়ন্ত্রণের নেতৃবৃন্দ ও নীতি প্রণেতাদের বাধ্যতামূলক আক্রমণ ও হুমকি দিয়ে তাদের কর্মকাণ্ডে অবমূল্যায়ন ও জনমনে বিশ্বাস হ্রাস করা

জনসংস্করণ ও কোম্পানিদের সামাজিক দায়বদ্ধতা কর্মসূচি

গোধূলিয়াতা বা অপরূপ অভিযোগের লক্ষ্যে শিক্ষা, খোলাখোলা, সামাজিক ও জনসংস্করণকে সহায়তা এবং এসব কার্যক্রমে নীতি-নিদর্শকদের সম্পূর্ণ করা

তামাক কোম্পানিদের 'সামাজিক দায়বদ্ধতা' ইমেজ তুলে ধরার লক্ষ্যে তামাক উৎপাদনকারী একাত্তরে বিভিন্ন প্রক্রিয়া অর্থায়ন

মিছিলিতে সামাজিক দায়বদ্ধতা কর্মসূচির আওতায়ী প্রক্রিয়ার বিস্মৃত প্রচার

জনসংস্করণ, গণমাধ্যমকে ব্যবহার

জনসংস্করণের মতামত অপর অকাঙ্ক্ষা বিকৃতভাবে উপস্থাপন

কোম্পানিদের পক্ষে অস্বচ্ছ তৈরিতে বিভিন্ন সুবিধা প্রদানের মাধ্যমে গণমাধ্যমকে ব্যবহার (যেমন: জেটিকিয়ার এবং ডিভিশনের প্রমাণ হোম, উপহার, গণমাধ্যম পর্দার, পণ্যসম্পর্ক ইত্যাদি)

বাস্তবায়নকে হেঁকে বিভিন্ন বিষয়ক বিরোধ গণমাধ্যমে প্রচার করা (যেমন: গণমাধ্যম প্রেস না বলে 'প্রেক্ষা' ধূমপান নিষিদ্ধ কলা, তামাক নিয়ন্ত্রণ আইনের বেশিরভাগ ধারাই বাতিলযোগ্য হারাই বাতিলযোগ্য নয় ইত্যাদি)

চোরচালনা

কর্মীবিদ্ধি ও বাজার নিয়ন্ত্রণের প্রতিবাদন্ত অবমূল্যায়ন অথবা দুর্বলকরণের লক্ষ্যে কার্যক্রম গ্রহণ

আইনের ধারা অনাজ্ঞ বা অভঃকরণ, দূর্বলতা কাজে লাগানো

আইনের ফাক-ফাক কাজে লাগানোর লক্ষ্যে আইন বাতিলযোগ্য বাধ্যতামূলক করার কার্যক্রম গ্রহণ

তামাক্পরিয় গার্ডের অবাধ্য রাখার আইনের বিভিন্ন ধারা বিকৃতভাবে উপস্থাপন ও ব্যবহার

Threatening

Assault and threat tobacco control community and policymaking leaders in person to undermine their activities and create false impression about their work

Social services and CSR

Assist in art, culture and social services and involve policymakers in those activities only to be trustworthy

Provide funds on different welfare projects to create a 'socially responsible' image

Extensively promote CSR projects in mass media

Public relation and using mass media

Distort public opinion

Offer perks (such as pleasure trips for the gatekeepers, editors, media award etc.) to media people for creating pro-tobacco environment

Airing/publishing misleading ideas to undermine health policies (such as altering the meaning of 'public place' with 'open space', saying that most of the sections of tobacco control law are not implementable etc.)

Smuggling

Undertake programs to weaken policies on taxation and market regulation

Law violation, exploiting loopholes

Undertake programs to utilize the loopholes of tobacco control law for obstructing its implementation process

Falsify articles of tobacco control law for continuing tobacco promotion

Source: http://sdlhammika.blogspot.com/2012/01/wolves-in-sheeps-clothing.html
Tobacco Industry in Bangladesh

History of Tobacco Industry

The history of tobacco industry is not as old as the tobacco consumption is in Bangladesh. For years, tobacco production and processing were mainly household affairs. *Tendu* leaf *bidi*, *hookah* (bubble-bubble) and other smokeless tobacco (*gul*, *zarda*, *sadapata* etc.) were used as tobacco products, and were produced in small scales at the households to be sold at rural markets. Although there is no concrete information on the institutional history of tobacco industry, it is known that Akij Tobacco started its journey in Bangladesh (the then East Pakistan) in 1948 by producing first hand-made paper *bidi*. In 1949, British American Tobacco (BAT) (the then Pakistan Tobacco Company - PTC) established their first factory in Faujderhat under Chittagong district. Immediately after the Independence, in 1972, the company was named 'Bangladesh Tobacco Company Limited (BTCL)' and thus started the expansion of the tobacco industry in Bangladesh.

'Tobacco Industry' in Bangladesh

'Tobacco industry' refers to an entire group of business that includes manufacturers, importers and distributors of tobacco products and processors of tobacco leaf, whose only goal is to make profits. Tobacco industry in Bangladesh consists of three subsectors: (1) cigarette, (2) *bidi* (local form of handrolled cigarette) and (3) smokeless or chewing tobacco (*zarda*, *gul* etc.).
Among the 12 cigarette companies in Bangladesh, British American Tobacco Bangladesh (BATB), Dhaka Tobacco Industry (DTI), Abul Khair Tobacco Company, Nasir Tobacco, National Tobacco etc. are noteworthy. Most of these companies have more than one brands of cigarettes in the market. Since these companies are fully mechanised, they do not employ a lot of workers in the factories.

There are 117 bidi factories in 31 districts in Bangladesh, of which Akij Bidi, Aziz Bidi, Abul Bidi, Ansar Bidi, Nasir Bidi, Ali Bidi, Amena Bidi, Bonani Bidi etc. are notable. Being non-mechanized, the production process in these factories is heavily based on manual human labor, much of which comes from women and child laborers. The bidi factories directly employ about 65 thousand workers, who are assisted at the household level by about 220 thousand additional people.

No accurate figure is available about the number of factories producing smokeless tobacco products including zarda and gul. However, 312 zarda factories and 60 gul factories are enlisted under VAT registration of National Board of Revenue (NBR). The common zarda brands in the market are Hakimpuri, Nurani, Shurovi, Baba, Akij etc. Among the gul brands Eagle, Manas, Mostafa, Ghora Marka Gul etc. are the most common ones. There is no accurate estimate of the number of laborers engaged in the smokeless tobacco industry. However, a recent study figured out 37 thousand workers in 141 factories found in 35 districts. Five thousand of these laborers are children.
Major Districts Producing Tobacco And Tobacco Products In Bangladesh

At a glance
Number of cigarette industry: 12
Number of bidi factory: 117
Number of jarda factory: 312
Number of gul factory: 60
Tobacco cultivation: 49000 hectares
Tobacco Cultivation

Seven (07) districts of greater Rangpur region (Rangpur, Lalmonirhat, Kurigram, Gaibandha, Dinajpur, Thakurgaon and Panchagarh), four (4) districts in Kustia region (Kushtia, Meherpur, Chuadanga and Jhenaidah), Narail, Jessore and Manikganj districts are well-known for tobacco cultivation. However, in the last few years, tobacco farming expanded heavily in Khagrachhari, Bandarban and Cox's Bazar districts of the hill tracts region. According to government statistics, tobacco was cultivated in 49,000 hectares of land in 2009 in the country.

Although there is no authentic number of tobacco farmers, a study says that 0.6% of agricultural labor force is engaged in tobacco cultivation. The total agricultural labour force in 2009 was 25.8 million, and accordingly the number of tobacco farmers is estimated to be 155 thousand.

Production of Tobacco & Tobacco Products

The country in 2009 produced 98,000 metric tons of tobacco. A total of 76,000 million cigarette sticks (2010-11) and 48,624 million bidi sticks (2012) are produced annually in the country. Besides, large volumes of smokeless tobacco (zarda, gul and sadapata etc.) are also produced although no accurate estimates are available on that.
Tobacco in Bangladeshi Economy

Tobacco enjoys an important position in Bangladesh economy. Around 11% of total taxes collected by the National Board of Revenue (NBR) are from tobacco sector. In the 2011-12 fiscal year, Tk. 101.73 billion has been realized from cigarette, Tk. 2.13 billion from bidi, Tk. 70 million form zarda and Tk. 3.6 million from gul as taxes.\textsuperscript{13} Data from Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) says that the total value of export of tobacco and tobacco products from Bangladesh in the fiscal year of 2011-12 was Tk. 10.87 billion.\textsuperscript{23}

Market Share of Tobacco Companies

In Bangladesh tobacco market, particularly in the rural areas, bidi is a widely used cheap commodity. Analysis of the bidi market reveals that four (04) bidi factories have a combined share of almost half of the total bidi market: Akij Bidi (29.10%), Aziz Bidi (10.80%), Ansar Bidi (4.80%) and Nasir Bidi (4.70%).\textsuperscript{24}
Cigarette Company Market Shares, Bangladesh, Selected Years

Cigarette
British American Tobacco Bangladesh (BATB) has been occupying around half of the cigarette market in Bangladesh for more than a decade. BATB market share, which was more than 50% in 2000, declined a little in 2010. On the other hand, market share of the domestic companies, which was declining from 2002, started rising from 2008 and currently it is more than half of the market.

No accurate estimate can be made about the market share of the smokeless tobacco due to lack of information.

Tobacco Industry's Profit
To get an idea of how the profit of the tobacco industry is increasing, an analysis of profit of one of the largest tobacco companies, British American Tobacco Bangladesh (BATB) shows that it has been increasing sharply in five years since 2008 despite a falling market share. BATB profit almost threefolded from Tk. 2.24 billion in 2008 to 6.50 billion in 2012.

নির্দেশনা
গত এক দশককের মধ্যে বৈশিষ্ট্যের প্রায় অর্ধেক দরকার করে আছে ব্রিটিশ আমেরিকান টোবাকো বাংলাদেশ (বিএটিবি). ২০০০ সালের দিকে বিএটিবি’র মার্কেট শেয়ার ৫০ শতাংশের কিছু বেশি থাকলেও ২০১০ সালে এসে তা কমে চললে। অপরদিকে দেশি কোম্পানিগুলির মার্কেট শেয়ার ২০০২ সালের পর কমে চললেও ২০০৮ সাল থেকে তা বাড়তে শুরু করে এবং বর্তমানে তা অর্ধেকের সমান।

ধরেন্দ্রবিহির্নী তামাকের তথ্যের অন্তর্ভুক্তির কারণে এর মার্কেট শেয়ার সম্পর্কে কোনো ধারণা করা যায়নি।
Information about the profit of *bidi* and smokeless tobacco companies has not been found and hence no idea about their profits could be made.

**Summary**

No matter when they started and expanded, the tobacco industry currently has a market of 1 billion US Dollar (2009 information), and with the increasing number of tobacco consumers, the market is growing by 3% every year. At present, 43% of the adult people of the country consume tobacco, which was 36% in 2004. Tobacco sales and the profit of the tobacco companies are increasing every day which is ominous for public health, environment and economy. The increasing trend of profit of the tobacco companies indicates that more people will consume tobacco causing more disabilities and more deaths. According to World Health Organization (WHO), the number of tobacco-related deaths in 2004 was 57,000 which is thought to have increased substantially since then. Therefore, tobacco control law, policies and tax measures should be formulated and enforced to prevent tobacco-related deaths and ensure accountability of the tobacco industry.
Tobacco Industry Interference: Bangladesh Perspective

Tobacco companies adopt various ill tactics to interfere in the process of formulating and implementing tobacco control policies. Such interference from tobacco industry are considered as one of the main obstacles in implementation 'Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC)'. Tobacco giants, particularly Phillip Morris International (PMI), British American Tobacco (BAT) and Japan Tobacco (JT) are aggressively working to weaken tobacco control activities and to expand tobacco use globally as well.

However, Bangladesh too is not free from the clutch of tobacco industry. Domestic and overseas tobacco companies are influencing tobacco control activities for sustaining their business in the country. To influence tobacco control activities, the tobacco companies adopt different tricks like using financial influence; direct and indirect political lobbying and financing; mobilizing misleading front groups; funding NGOs and development advocacy teams; research assistance; tactful advertisement and Corporate Social Responsibilities etc. In Bangladesh, tobacco industry interferences are mainly policy-centered that has evolved around the tobacco control law amendment and tax imposition in recent years.
Tobacco industry interference in amendment of Tobacco Control Law

The government of Bangladesh enacted the 'Smoking and Tobacco Products Usage (Control) Act' in 2005. Although the law complied fully or partially with a number of articles of FCTC, some major loopholes remained. As a result, the law could not play effective role in tobacco control. In this context, initiative for amending the law was taken a couple of years ago. The draft amendment of the law included inclusion of smokeless tobacco (e.g. gul, zarda) in the definition of 'tobacco products'; expanding the definitions of public places and public transports; removing the scope of designated smoking area in smoke-free public places; banning the use of misleading descriptors such as 'light', 'mild', 'low-tar', 'extra', 'ultra' on tobacco products; introducing pictorial health warnings on packets and containers of tobacco products; increasing penalty for law violation and focusing more on companies than individuals regarding penalties. The Cabinet approved proposed amendment of the law on August 27, 2012. The draft recommended expanding the definition of public places and authorizing the local governments to declare any place as 'public place'. However, the Cabinet
cancelled the proposal of eliminating the scope of designated smoking area in public places. Thus the initiative of making public places 100% smoke-free went in vein. Moreover, the Cabinet reduced the penalty for smoking in public places from Tk 500 to Tk 100 although it was finally made Tk 300. The tobacco companies had been using existing loopholes of the law to continue advertisement and promotion of tobacco products. With a view to making the ban on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorships more stringent, the amendment proposed to impose a penalty of maximum one million taka for violation of the ban, but the Cabinet reduced it to maximum 100 thousand taka.

With these recommendations, the Cabinet on November 26, 2012 approved the draft Bill for amendment. However, the draft Bill was stuck for three months in the Health Ministry and the Law Ministry, and was tabled in the Parliament on March 4, 2013. It was then sent to the Parliamentary Standing Committee for further scrutiny. In the first meeting of the Committee it was agreed that elimination of designated smoking area would be suggested. But in the second meeting a member of the committee, influenced by the tobacco companies annulled the proposal and also suggested 'regulating' tobacco sponsorship instead of 'banning'; and he was
The excuse that was placed in favor of his suggestion was that the stipends and donations from the tobacco companies were beneficial for common people and therefore, it should not be stopped. The law was passed in the Parliament on April 29, 2013 and was gazetted on May 2, 2013.

Following the enactment of the amended law, the process of formulation of Rules started immediately; but that process too is being delayed due to tobacco industry interference. Tobacco companies have issued letter to the Health Secretary for allowing them 18 months instead of the proposed six months for implementing one of the most important sections of the amended law (pictorial health warning) and are lobbying strongly to change the decision of the Health Ministry. In addition, tobacco companies are using the media to defend their position in this regard. Thus, the process of amendment of the tobacco control law has been facing various conspiracies and interferences of the tobacco industry. Tobacco companies have constantly tried in multiple ways to deter the process of law amendment including weakening of the content and delaying the entire process. At times they engaged influential quarters of the government, sometimes MPs, media or civil society, or utilized the innocent workers involved in the process of tobacco production.

Few examples of such interferences of the tobacco industry from the beginning of the process of law amendment are presented here.
**BAT urges minister to earmark smoking zones**

*Business Report*

A delegation of British-American Tobacco (BAT) Company met Industries Minister at his office Sunday and demanded that the government should earmark public places in line with the practice followed in the developed countries. They have moreover sought the government support to protect the interest industry, which contributes, they said, over Tk 7,500 crore to national exchequer.

BAT director Jakir Ibne Hai, company secretary Azizul Islam and managing director of the delegation, Industries Secretary KH Masud Siddiqui were also present. BAT officials sought the cooperation of the minister in protecting the industry. They said a total of about 60 lakh people are directly and indirectly, are involved in the tobacco industry. They said though smoking is prohibited in all developed world, they have special smoking zones in public places.

*This scope is not included in Bangladesh’s amended Tobacco Control Act. They called for setting aside smoking zones in public places of the country’s nations.*

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**Tobacco industry worked relentlessly to hinder the tobacco control law amendment process and influence policy makers against the amendment.**

A day before the placement of the draft of the law amendment bill for Cabinet approval, on 18 December 2011, a team from British American Tobacco Bangladesh (BATB) met the Industries Minister to place their strong objection about the amendment and also presented some of their demands to the Minister. One of their demands was to keep the provision for designated smoking area, which the draft proposed to repeal. On the same day, BATB issued a letter to the Finance Minister opposing the amendment of the law with the argument of possible revenue loss by the government. The draft amendment Bill was placed before the cabinet for initial approval on 19 December 2011 and the cabinet returned the Bill with the excuse of further scrutiny following interference by the Finance Minister. Eight months later, the law got initial approval of the cabinet on August 27, 2012, and was passed on April 29, 2013 in the Parliament accommodating the designating smoking area and some other unjustified demands of the tobacco industry.

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*Letter sent by BATB to the Finance Minister opposing amendment of tobacco control law.*
The proposed amendment of the law included a ban on sponsorship activities by tobacco companies but a member of Parliamentary Standing Committee on Health and Family Welfare vetoed and finally the Committee recommended ‘regulating’ instead of ‘banning’ sponsorship by the tobacco companies. The member was also seen in participating in activities of an organization titled 'Common Interest Group Against Tobacco' (CIGAT) as the convener, which was suddenly formed before the national budget couple of years ago. The forum was opposing the use of cigarette only and demanded to impose tax on cigarette as tobacco product, but was silent about bidi although it is a popular tobacco product in the rural areas of Bangladesh.

The mysterious silence of this forum about the demand for taxing bidi and in some cases its indirect support for the demand of tax exemption for bidi in the name of the interest of bidi workers created doubts among the anti-tobacco groups about the actual purpose of it. It should be noted that activities of such organizations are seen only before budget each year.

Notice for providing scholarships to students by a tobacco company. The three districts covered by the scholarships are all tobacco-growing districts.
Tobacco industry uses some 'Front Groups' (root level organizations supported by the tobacco industry) to oppose tobacco control law amendment. The tobacco industry uses the groups mainly to protect their interest by weakening the law amendment process. Bidi workers on December 17, 2011, two days before the cabinet meeting, formed a human chain with the banner of Bangladesh Bidi Workers Federation claiming that tobacco industry would be ruined if the tobacco control law was amended.

Tobacco industry is funding research to create 'evidences' on the benefits of tobacco production. Recently, BAT financed two such researches on Bangladesh. One of them focused on the socio-economic and environmental impacts of tobacco cultivation and the other highlighted the positive effects of tobacco cultivation on rural livelihoods, and the preface said that the research would help the policy makers in taking decisions on tobacco cultivation. Moreover, tobacco industry is deploying policy makers (MPs) for advocating in favor of tobacco cultivation. A ruling party MP, also the

This report is prepared by Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh (PRI), field level survey conducted by Nielsen Bangladesh and commissioned by British American Tobacco Bangladesh.
chair of the Parliamentary Standing Committee for agriculture, took his stance on the boundary of the tobacco companies and said in different programs that since tobacco cultivation earned foreign currency, the government should consider the fact before taking decision on tobacco cultivation; and that tobacco should be exported after farming on the fallow lands. Moreover, an objection was raised at the Cabinet meeting (August 27, 2012) while approving the draft amendment on the sub-section of the 2005 law that provided loan opportunities to farmers for shifting out of tobacco cultivation; and further scrutiny was recommended at the same meeting. Later, the sub-section was excluded in the final amendment and was replaced by a directive only to formulate policies for discouraging tobacco production and farming.

Tobacco industry is influencing policy makers against tobacco control by involving them in their activities of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). A number of influential ministers, government officials and political leaders were seen participating at the inaugural ceremonies of cultural programmes, forestation and water supply programs organized by BAT. It was interesting to note that the Smoking and Tobacco Products Usages (Control) (Amendment) Act was returned without approval first time from the Cabinet due to protest by the Finance Minister, and on the very same day, the Minister inaugurated an art exhibition organized by BATB. During the crucial stage of the law amendment process, CSR advertisements (e.g. solar power, water supply) were published frequently on media to manipulate the gatekeepers and the management of the media by financing through advertisements. BATB published 25 large size (mostly half-page) advertisements of CSR programs on 12 leading dailies during January - May 2012.
Bill to amend tobacco act likely to be placed in JS next session

Enforcement of some proposed provisions may face difficulty

The government is most likely to table in the next session of the parliament a bill to amend the Tobacco Control Act, 2005, with a view to making the law more effective in combating the sale, distribution and advertisement of tobacco products in a manner that does not carry any health warning as required under the relevant act. The amendments proposed under the new bill would, among others, propose to impose an increased minimum tax on tobacco products and to provide for a wider coverage of health warnings on tobacco products. The government has also proposed to increase the minimum age for purchasing tobacco products to 18 years.

In the wake of the recent increase in the price of cigarettes and other tobacco products, leading to a significant reduction in consumption, the government is expected to table the bill in the parliament in the current session. The amended bill is expected to provide for a wider coverage of health warnings and to provide for a wider coverage of health warnings on tobacco products. The government has also proposed to increase the minimum age for purchasing tobacco products to 18 years.

Tobacco industry used mass media to mislead people by propagating distorted facts about the tobacco control law amendment. These tactics of the tobacco industry were targeted only to hindering and weakening the tobacco control law amendment process. The industry used mass media to propagate various misleading arguments including the revenue loss of the government, hike in smuggled tobacco products in the market, unemployment of the tobacco-laborers, retailers' inability to pay huge amount of penalty for tobacco advertising, and many other such arguments. Thus the tobacco industry tried to capitalize on people's trust and confidence on the mass media of the country.
Along with tobacco control law, increasing tobacco prices is one of the most effective ways to reduce tobacco consumption. It is recognized even by the tobacco industry that the tobacco taxation reduces tobacco use to a great extent. A document from one of the largest cigarette producers, Phillip Morris, acknowledged the fact long ago: "Of all the concerns, there is one - taxation - that alarms us the most. While marketing restrictions and public and passive smoking [restrictions] do depress volume, in our experience taxation depresses it much more severely. Our concern for taxation is, therefore, central to our thinking about smoking and health." Naturally, all the quarters related to tobacco business will oppose any tobacco control policy by the government and also will try to mislead the government on the issue.

Tax increase on tobacco should be supported at least on three grounds. First, moral (public health) ground: real price of tobacco should be increased to reduce tobacco use that kills people. Second, economic ground: increase in tobacco tax is profitable for the government as it generates more tax revenue immediately. Third, legal ground: as a member to FCTC, it is important to respect the international legal obligation and hence increase taxes on tobacco.
An analysis of possible impact of tobacco taxation in Bangladesh shows, if supplementary duty on tobacco products is fixed at 70% of retail price, consumption will fall by 13,600 million sticks of cigarettes and bidis in a year and the government will earn Tk. 15,880 million as additional revenue. But tobacco consumption has not reduced, rather it has increased in absence of effective tax measures: tobacco use prevalence increased from 37% in 2004 to 43% in 2009. In 1994, the volume of cigarette production was 16,000 million sticks and it went up to 76,000 million sticks in 2010-11. Thus the production of cigarettes almost five-folded in 16 years. Overall, it is clear that the use of tobacco has been increasing in Bangladesh. On the other hand, the real prices of cigarettes and bidis have been falling every year, i.e. tobacco products have become cheaper compared to other daily necessities in Bangladesh.

Just like in many countries of the world, it has been proved in Bangladesh as well that tobacco use declines when the price goes up. Using the Bangladesh data of 24 years from 1981 to 2004, it has been revealed that consumption of cigarettes significantly declined when cigarette's real price went up (Figure:1).

**Figure:1**

**Consumption versus Real Price of Cigarettes: 1981-2004**

- **Consumption of cigarettes per annum (millions of pack of 20 sticks)**
- **Real price of cigarettes per pack of 20 sticks (deflated using CPI, 1995/96=100)**
বিশ্ববাংলা এক গবেষণা মতে, তামাকজাত দ্বারা ১০ শতাংশ (প্রকৃত) মূল্যবৃদ্ধি করা হলে এর ব্যবহার উন্নত দেশে ৪ শতাংশ এবং উন্নয়নশীল দেশে ৮ শতাংশ পর্যন্ত কমে আসে।

বাংলাদেশে বর্তমানে তামাক ব্যবহারকারীর সংখ্যা ৪ কোটিরও বেশি। এর একটি বড় অংশ দরিদ্র মানুষ। সুতরাং তামাকপ্রাপ্তির উপর উচ্চহারে করারোপের মাধ্যমে মূল্যবৃদ্ধি করা হলে তরুণ ছেলেমেয়েরা নতুন কার্যে তামাক ব্যবহার শুরু করবে না এবং দরিদ্র তামাকসেবকরা তামাক ছাড়তে বাধ্য হবে। কিন্তু তামাকের মূল্য বৃদ্ধির জন্য কার্যকর পদক্ষেপ অর্থাৎ তামাকপ্রাপ্তির করারোপের সঠিক নীতি প্রণয়ন এবং বাদবাজারের উদ্যোগ আমাদের দেশে কখনই গ্রহণ করা হয়নি।

এর পেছনে সরকারের রাজনৈতিক জনপ্রিয়তা হারানোর ভয়ে নেমন রয়েছে তেমনি রয়েছে তামাক ও তামাকজাত পণ্য উপাদান প্রক্রিয়ায় জড়িত মানুষের কাজ হারানোর শখ, তামাক থেকে অর্জিত রাজস্ব হারানোর প্রকৃতি। তবে এর ধারণা মূলত তামাক কোম্পানিয়েরই সুই এবং নীতি-নির্ধারকমন্ত্রীকে বিভাগ করার মাধ্যমে তাদের বাসায়িক স্বার্থ হাসিলের এক বৈষ্ঠ কৌশল।

বাংলাদেশে তামাকের কর বিভাগের পাতলও প্রাপ্ত হয়ে থাকে জাতীয় বাজেটের মাধ্যমে। এই বাজেটের প্রণয়নে অর্থ মন্ত্রালয়ের সহযোগিতা করে জাতীয় রাজস্ব বোর্ড (এনবিআর)। বাজেট ঘোষণার (জুন মাস) আগের তিন মাসের (মার্চ-মে) বাজেট প্রণয়নের গুরুত্বপূর্ণ সময় হিসেবে বিবেচিত হয়। বছরের এই সময়কে টার্গেট করে তামাক কোম্পানিগুলো বাজেটে তামাকের উপর কর না বাড়াতে নানাধরী কর্মকাণ্ড পরিচালনা করে নীতি-নির্ধারী মহকুমায় প্রকাশিত করে থাকে।

According to a World Bank study, if the real price of tobacco is increased by 10%, tobacco use reduces by 4% in the developed and by about 8% in the developing countries.  

In Bangladesh, the number of tobacco users is more than 40 million (GATS, 2009). Since a larger portion of tobacco consumers are poor, increased tobacco prices will not allow them to continue tobacco use and also young people will not follow the course. Unfortunately, effective measures to impose higher taxes on tobacco products for curbing tobacco use have not yet been taken in the country. The government is reluctant to adopt such measures due to a number of perceived threats: losing political popularity, unemployment of the tobacco workers, revenue loss etc. However, these are perceptions created by the tobacco industry and are parts of global tactics for misleading policymakers to protect their commercial interest. Tobacco taxation measures in Bangladesh are usually taken in the national budget of the country. The National Board of Revenue (NBR) helps the Finance Ministry to plan and prepare the annual budget of the country. The three months (March-May) leading to announcement of the budget in June are considered as the most important time of the year in terms of influencing the budget. Tobacco industry targets this time of the year and undertakes various activities to influence policy makers so that taxes on tobacco are not increased in the budget.
Bidi companies manipulate the policy makers, particularly the MPs, in different ways against tax hike on tobacco products. The bidi companies, before the budget announcement each year, send DO (semi-official) letters issued by the MPs to the NBR requesting not to increase tax on bidi. During budget preparation for 2013-14, around 200 MPs sent DO letters to the NBR and the Finance Minister requesting not to increase tax on bidi and to remove all existing taxes on the product. In the budget session of the Parliament in 2009, the Prime Minister recommended to withdraw the proposed additional tax on bidi following the urge from an MP. Consequently, the additional tax proposed on bidi was withdrawn in that year's budget. In the following years as well, numerous lawmakers took stance in favor of not increasing taxes on bidi. As a result, no notable tax increase on bidi was seen in the last few years.
Tobacco industry adopts various tactics to reduce duties on tobacco. One such attempt was revealed when the Minister for Agriculture admitted, during the budget formulation of 2011-12, that she signed a request for reducing duty on tobacco export 'by mistake', which resulted in reduction of the duty from 10% to 5% since that year.\textsuperscript{64}

Interferences by tobacco industry, particularly by cigarette companies, in determining tax rates have become common in Bangladesh. Various sources in the National Board of Revenue (NBR) have said that cigarette companies participate in the pre-budget discussions to place their proposals on cigarette tax rates, which they send in writing as well. NBR generally prioritizes the proposals from a multinational cigarette company.

Bidi factory owners do not lag behind as well in interfering tobacco taxation. With the demand for not imposing tax on bidi, they arrange different programmes to draw attention of the policy makers and use the bidi labourers as 'front group'.\textsuperscript{65,66} Lastly, in 2013-14 budget, the supplementary duty on bidi was proposed to go up to 30% from 20%, but the proposal was withdrawn from the final budget\textsuperscript{68} due to the agitations of bidi laborers sponsored by the tobacco companies.\textsuperscript{66,67} Moreover, the bidi factory owners adopt deceptive tactics to strengthen the position of the policymakers in favor on bidi. For instance, before the budget of 2013, an organization titled Human Resource and Health Foundation (HRHF) organized press conference, human chain in front of NBR, and sent memorandum to the Chairman of NBR with the demand for doubling the tax rate on cheap cigarettes.\textsuperscript{69}
Another organization named Research and Development Collective (RDC) organized various programs for 'saving lives' of the bidi workers by reducing tax on bidi. Such programs included meetings, seminars, and television talk shows involving civil society members, public health specialists and labour organization leaders; and short film on the life of bidi workers. Before the budgets of 2012-13 and 2013-14, an organization named 'Campaign for Clean Air' demanded a higher taxes on cigarette only based on their survey showing cigarette as the most used tobacco product in the country. Before the 2011 budget, a couple of public health NGOs formed a forum called 'Common Interest Group Against Tobacco' (CIGAT) (in the Bangla name, the word 'cigarette' was used instead of 'tobacco'). The forum conducted various campaigns to raise tax only on cigarette. These are some of the examples of the various tactics that bidi factory owners adopt to prevent bidi taxation in the name of raising taxes on cigarette only.

Street agitations protesting increase in bidi tax
Illicit tobacco business hits govt revenue drive

Mohammad Ali

Illicit tobacco business has become rampant in recent years, with the government facing significant losses in revenue every year.

According to official data, the government lost Tk 767 million in revenue in 2011 due to the onslaught of illicit tobacco business. These losses are estimated to be as high as Tk 3.37 billion per cent of the annual government revenue.

There remains a need to address this issue in the context of public health and the economy.

A public health expert, a university teacher, and a cancer specialist discussed the importance of not increasing taxes on bidi.

'Tobacco taxation increases tobacco smuggling' is another misleading propaganda that the tobacco industry runs to draw attention of the policy makers. Tobacco industry engages the media to propagate the argument, especially before the budget declaration. Those reports highlight that the country is flooded with smuggled cheap cigarettes and the government is losing revenue every year; hence, further increase in tobacco taxes will worsen the situation. It should be noted that the prices of tobacco products in Bangladesh are much lower compared to neighboring countries.

Tobacco industry uses elite persons of the society as lobbyists to protect their commercial interests. Such moves increase before the budget every year. The lobbyists are seen participating in
Cigarette market expands
25 lakh bidi workers jobless

Staff Reporter

About 25 lakh bidi workers have become jobless by hundred factories across the country over the last 10 years due to the tobacco industry’s structure is causing the catastrophe in bidi industry. The explosion of bidi factories has not been found in the country in the recent years, according to a report from the Workers' Federation on Tuesday. They said that the bidi industry has expanded in the country, and 24 lakh bidi workers were working in different areas of the country. At present only 95 bidi factories are working in the country, in which approximately 24 lakh workers are working. Among them, about 25 lakh workers lost their jobs. The federation says that the government imposes high tax on bidi in every national budget, which is imposed so high for the cigarette in comparison with the cheaper cigarette. This situation is going on, added, the leaders. Meanwhile, a research report from the federation says that the tobacco industry influences the media houses in different ways for running their propaganda. Their aim is to propagate misleading information in order to draw policymakers' attention. Owners of leading bidi companies lead delegates to visit media houses to win their support for the bidi sector in favor of resisting tax increase on bidi with the myths of 'employment of huge manpower', 'threats of unemployment of millions of workers', etc.

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Measures to fight tobacco industry interference

Strengthening anti-tobacco movement is one of the key reasons behind the recent aggressiveness of the tobacco industry in Bangladesh. Formulation and implementation of effective tobacco control policies can contribute to stopping the aggressive tobacco industry interferences. The following measures should also be taken:

- The government should continuously be reminded of the legal obligations of FCTC and its Article 5.3 to emphasize that the processes of formulation and implementation of tobacco control policies should be free from the influence of the tobacco industry.

- Tobacco industry activities should be brought under surveillance. Besides, the ill tactics of the tobacco industry to obstruct effective tobacco control measures should be exposed through the media.

- Myths propagated by tobacco industry should be effectively countered with proper evidence-based campaigns. Tobacco control activists should be more active in generating the evidence-base. Besides, the journalists can play a vital role by publishing more investigative reports on tobacco industry interferences to hinder tobacco control policies.

- Awareness among the public and policy-makers should be created about the fact that tobacco industry is not a normal industry, rather a harmful one.

Source: http://myonething.ca/blog/category/tobacco/nmsw/


34 Red tape impeding TCA amendment. The daily Janakantha, 16 February 2013.


39 Health warning pictorial on tobacco packs needs deadline extension. The Independent, 02 December 2013.


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PROGGA started its journey with the philosophy of 'Knowledge for Progress'. To us, 'progga' is the blend of knowledge and experience. As a non-profit advocacy and research organization, PROGGA started its journey in January 2008. Though it is a young organization in terms of experience, the innovative capacity and endless motivation for work of a group of young activists continues to enrich PROGGA. The core activities of PROGGA are advocacy, research, audio-visual documentation and different capacity building trainings. PROGGA believes that there is no alternative to advocacy for successful application of research based knowledge and drawing attention of the policy makers. Of course, the advocacy has to be realistic, timely, and above all, innovative. In this case, PROGGA has always prioritized mass media of Bangladesh. We believe that mass media can be one of the best vehicles to protect public interest. 'Media for Control Tobacco' is such an initiative of PROGGA. The initiative, with support from Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids, aims at strengthening the role of mass media in creating public awareness to protect Bangladeshis from harms of tobacco and drawing attention of the policy makers to do the needful. In 2010, PROGGA and the Press Institute of Bangladesh (PIB) jointly started tobacco control training workshops for journalists. Based on recommendations from workshop participants, Anti-Tobacco Media Alliance (ATMA) was created as a media network of over 300 journalists of the country. ATMA aims at ensuring effective role of media in building a tobacco-free Bangladesh. PROGGA has been working as the secretariat of ATMA. Although started as a project, tobacco control has become a major part of PROGGA's focus. Accordingly, PROGGA is committed to continue playing a strong role in tobacco control in the coming days.