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'Tobacco industry active to influence decision'

Source: Our staff reporter Submitted 1 day 11 hrs ago

ISLAMABAD-The recently held meeting of the representatives of tobacco industry with the Health Ministry officials without taking civil society members on board is being seen as a threat to the effective implementation of the tobacco control initiatives taken by the Ministry.

It may also affect initiatives such as withdrawal of the controversial SRO favouring Designated Smoking Areas and incorporation of pictorial health warnings on cigarette packs.

Since the Ministry is all set to implement the much-awaited decision of pictorial health warnings on cigarette packs, the tobacco industry is mounting pressure on the Ministry to hold the decision.

The Ministry has also asked the tobacco industry to come up with pictorial health warnings on new packing of cigarettes within the time period of six months. On the other hand the tobacco industry that spends millions of rupees in Pakistan in preparing marketing strategies for cigarettes and other products to attract youngsters, believing them to be the most vulnerable segment of the society in terms of adopting smoking habit is reluctant to comply by the decision.

The tobacco industry is supporting their stance with examples of Switzerland, UK and Romania that gave 24 months of time period for implementation of the pictorial health warnings.

It is worth-mentioning here that more than 30 countries across the globe have already implemented the pictorial health warnings within the time period of one year.

Meanwhile, TheNetwork for Consumer Protection a non-profit organization has appealed to the Ministry not to step back from its decision to implement the warnings by Jan 1, 2010.

Talking to TheNation Waqar Ahmad Chief Executive Officer of the TheNetwork requested the ministry of health not to step back from its decision to implement the warnings by Jan 1, 2010. He was of the view that Ministry should immediately ban all clandestine meetings with Tobacco industry especially in absence of civil society representatives. "Ministry of Health Pakistan should look towards Hong Kong as an example where representatives of Health Ministry are banned to interact with tobacco industry", he added.

"Ministry of Health should look towards Hong Kong as an example where representatives of Health Ministry are banned to interact with tobacco industry", he continued.

On behalf of TheNetwork I strongly condemn any type of cooperation and interaction of Ministry of Health with Tobacco Industry for implementation of tobacco control policies in its true spirit.

The National Tobacco Control Alliance, Shoukat Khanum Memorial Cancer Hospital (members Technical Advisory Group of Ministry of Health for Tobacco Control) and CTC-Pakistan also showed their concern on the efforts of tobacco industry to influence the ministry to get relaxation in time period to implement the pictorial warnings.

<http://www.nation.com.pk/pakistan-news-newspaper-daily-english-online//Regional/20-Jun-2009/Tobacco-industry-active-to-influence-decision>