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Tobacco claims 100,000 lives annually in Pakistan

OUR STAFF REPORTER

ISLAMABAD - Use of tobacco killed around 100 million people in 20th century and if the current trend continues, there will be up to one billion deaths in the 21st century.

"Across the globe, nearly 5 million people died of tobacco-related diseases in 2008, which is more than tuberculosis, HIV-AIDS and malaria combined," said a senior official in the health ministry.

In Pakistan, the situation is not different with around 100,000 deaths occurring from

tobacco use annually in the country and over half of the adult population being addicted in one form or the other.

Pakistan after ratification of FCTC (Framework Convention on Tobacco Control) promulgated the Prohibition of Smoking and Non-smokers Health Ordinance in 2002 but the legislation has not yet been effectively implemented for tobacco control.

The government on September 6, 2008 issued SRO containing guidelines for the establishment of designated smok-

ing areas (DSAs). However, no other decision of the Ministry of Health has faced as much media criticism than the said SRO.

The official further said that the health managers had announced immediate rollback of the controversial Statutory Regulatory Order (SRO) on Designated Smoking Areas (DSAs) and making the printing of pictorial health warnings on cigarette packets and with effect from January 1, 2010. The government was laudable despite pressure by the tobacco industry that used all

time-gaining tactics, the official said.

However, mere announcement was not enough and the government should take some steps for its implementation also, he said. "If the 'Prohibition of Smoking & Protection of Non-Smokers Health Ordinance' promulgated in 2002 was implemented effectively, we could be able to save our young generation from becoming the victim," he said.

It is the best practice for a country like Pakistan to print pictorial health warnings on cigarette packets where lit-

eracy rate is very low, so people need to be warned of the health risks of smoking through graphic representations.

Tobacco industry, however, has a lot of clout and hampering comprehensive tobacco control reforms as suggested under Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC).

The civic bodies and health experts working against the tobacco use believe that tobacco industry is out to block the government's decision on fresh pictorial health warnings.

The basic motive behind these objections is to pressure the government for the acceptance of its demands for an extension in the January 1, 2010 deadline for introduction of pictorial health warnings.

These civic bodies say that the tobacco companies in other countries can and have implemented picture warning requirements in as little as six months after notifications. Uruguay, Singapore, Brazil and Canada are some of these countries.

Venezuela has just updated

warnings and gave the industry 3 months to comply. Waqar Ahmed, Chief Executive Officer of The Network for Consumer Protection said the government should realize the hard reality that tobacco use was considered as one of the biggest public health threats, the world had ever faced.

He said though there were had anti-smoking laws, which clearly banned the advertisement and sale of cigarettes within 50 metres but one could easily find tobacco advertisement posters near different educational institutes.