

Smoking causes more deaths than suicide killings

TheNetwork launched awareness drive against smoking

By our correspondent

RAWALPINDI: Smoking is bigger evil than suicide bombing as 98,640 people (274 people per day) die of tobacco-related diseases in Pakistan every year and the spate of suicidal attacks in Pakistan has claimed roughly 6,000 lives from 9/11 to date.

Now after the printing of pictorial health warnings (PHWs) on cigarette packs and a strict ban on promotional activities of the tobacco industry, it is the responsibility of media persons to create awareness among the general public about hazards of smoking, besides keeping a strict vigil on clandestine promotional and advertising activities of the tobacco industry.

This was the crux of a discussion organised by TheNetwork for Consumer

Protection (TN) with journalists at the Rawalpindi Press Club on Thursday.

Speaking on the occasion, TN Advocacy and Research Coordinator Dr Anwar Rafay said Pakistan had alarmingly high rates of tobacco consumption with attendant chronic illnesses. "At least 25 percent of deaths in the country occur due to tobacco-related diseases such as heart attack, stroke, cancer and chronic respiratory conditions," he added.

Dr Anwar Rafay said it was the joint responsibility of the media and anti-smoking advocates to ensure the implementation of FCTC guidelines and the Prohibition of Smoking and Protection of Non-smokers Health Ordinance, 2002.

He said merciless tobacco industry was carrying out hidden promotional activi-

ties, flouting a strict ban on them. He said recently the TN drew the attention of the media towards promotional activities of a tobacco giant in flood-hit areas of Khyber Pakhtoonkhwa. "Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gilani took prompt action on the TN report carried by various leading newspapers," Dr Awar Rafay added. He urged media persons to join hands with anti-tobacco advocates to make Pakistan a smoking-free country.

Journalists belonging to print and electronic media took part in the discussion and asked queries about clandestine promotional activities of the tobacco industry. They were told by experts that recently a tobacco giant was found involved in the promotional activities under the garb of corporate social responsibility.