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http://DAWN.com Vol. LXIV No. 89 Islamabad, Rabi-us-Sani 14, 1431 Wednesday, March 31, 2010 20 PAGES Rs 15.00

Sports: saying no to tobacco money

THIS is apropos of the report (March 29) quoting the sports minister as suggesting using tobacco industry's money for promoting sports in the country.

The question arises, should one accept sponsorship from an industry which is the biggest contributor of disease and death in Pakistan?

Many organisations in the world have a firm policy of not accepting any funding from the tobacco industry.

Just like peace organisations wouldn't accept donations from landmine manufacturers, the sports ministry shouldn't accept money from an industry which is promoting unhealthy lifestyle in society.

The reason why all good organisations and governments do not accept

sponsorship from tobacco companies is very clear. Cigarettes have caused more deaths than any other consumer product in the history of the world.

WHO estimates that about 500 million people alive today will eventually be killed by tobacco, including 5.4 million in 2010. Tobacco industry products kill over 100,000 Pakistanis every year.

The numbers are so astronomical that they are hard for people to grasp. What is strange about the situation is that deaths and diseases caused by smoking are 100 per cent preventable.

The tobacco industry funding serves to create a moral lever to persuade the government to soften tobacco control legislation. By accepting donation the government legiti-

mises the tobacco industry's various tactics, including tobacco promotion to the youth.

These donations also serve to convince politicians that tobacco companies' motives are not suspect, that they can work with the government and that they want to be part of solution, because they care about people and not just profit.

By accepting tobacco money for activities like promotion of sports, the government allows the tobacco industry to advertise its generosity, suggesting to the public and legislators that it is a good corporate citizen.

The fact remains that the sole purpose of tobacco companies is to increase their profit. In order words, to sell more cigarettes at the cost of human lives.

What is good for the tobacco industry is bad for public health and vice versa. Fortunately, a growing number of organisations in the developed and the developing world are refusing to accept tobacco industries grants or contributions.

Last year an editor of a leading medical journal wrote: "Taking money from the tobacco industry offers the industry, at a cheap price, a respectability it doesn't deserve."

Let us hope that in this country also we develop courage to say no to tobacco money, which no doubt is tainted with blood of those who die every day from tobacco-related diseases.

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