

Tuesday

May 31, 2011

Jamadi-us-Sani 27, 1432 A.H.

INTERNATIONAL

THE NEWS

Islamabad/Rawalpindi Edition

Also published from
Lahore, Karachi, London and
globally on the World Wide Web at
<http://www.jang-group.com>

JANG GROUP OF NEWSPAPERS

28 Pages
Price Rs. 15.00

■ WORLD NO TOBACCO DAY 2011

Tobacco-related diseases kill 100,000 annually in Pakistan

Pakistan needs a total ban on tobacco advertising

Muhammad Qasim
Rawalpindi

Tobacco-related diseases kill 100,000 people in Pakistan every year — more than suicide bombing, road traffic accidents, honour killings and drug abuse combined.

The diseases and premature deaths caused by the tobacco use can be avoided by taking measures to reduce its prevalence.

Pakistan needs a total ban on tobacco advertising if the country has to protect its youth from the hazards of smoking, as partial measures are not enough. In addition to electronic and print media, ban should be extended on advertising smoking in dramas, movies, fashion magazines, billboards, fun fairs, musical concerts, sports, shops etc.

Pakistanis burn away over Rs600 million daily on cigarettes alone and equal amount on smokeless tobacco — 'naswar', 'paan', 'pan masala', 'gutka' and the like yet smoking is ad-

vertised as a pleasurable and 'cool' activity on shop-fronts and in youth magazines. TV drama serials also indirectly promote tobacco products.

Head of Community Medicine at CMH Lahore Medical College Dr. Muhammad Ashraf Chaudhry expressed this while talking to 'The News' in connection with World No Tobacco Day 2011, which is being observed today (on May 31) around the globe.

He added that a National Alliance for Tobacco Control (NATC) survey in major cities shows that only a handful of hotels and restaurants are implementing the government's total ban on smoking announced in May 2009. Regulations call for a fine of Rs1,000 to 100,000 on violating the indoor smoking ban, but unsurprisingly no such fines appear to have been levied so far.

Dr. Ashraf said that according to anti-smoking law, every owner/manager/in-charge of every place of public work or use must dis-

play a signboard at a conspicuous place, in and outside the premises visited by the general public, stating that the place is a, 'no smoking zone' and that 'smoking is an offence', but practically such signboard is hardly available at any public place including hotels and restaurants.

Defying ban on smoking at public places many popular restaurants have introduced 'Sheesha' (a form of smoking) in order to grasp more customers. Young boys and girls are openly smoking and enjoying 'sheesha' which probably has become a status symbol. Youngsters seem unaware about the ill effects of this "fruity-killer", he said.

"Sheesha smokers inhale more carbon monoxide than cigarette smokers, and thus put themselves at a greater risk of heart disease, stroke, cancers, impotency, infertility and chronic respiratory diseases," said Dr. Ashraf adding 'sheesha' smoker may inhale as much as smoke during one session as a

cigarette smoker inhales consuming 100 or more cigarettes.

He said that in offices (both private and government) smokers are openly violating the anti-smoking law and putting the health of non-smokers at risk, but there is no mechanism to check this violation.

The theme for World No Tobacco Day 2011 is 'The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control'. "The WHO FCTC is the world's foremost tobacco control instrument. In force since 2005, it is already widely embraced treaties in the history of United Nations with more than 170 countries including Pakistan and provides legal dimensions for cooperation in tobacco control. WHO FCTC demands that the countries must fully implement the treaty to protect present and future generations from the devastating health, social, environmental and economic consequences of tobacco consumption and exposure to tobacco smoke," explained Dr. Ashraf.

Tobacco advertising ban in Pak-

istan at present is only partial. From TV and billboards, the advertising of cigarettes has shifted to street walls and tobacco selling shops. Tobacco industry is carrying out hidden promotional activities despite strict ban.

To a query, Dr. Ashraf said that partial ban on cigarettes has no impact on decreasing the prevalence of smoking. "Media and anti-smoking advocates should collaborate for forcing government to implement Framework Convention on Tobacco Control Guidelines and the prohibition of Smoking and Protection of Non-Smokers Health Ordinance 2002." He said that provincial, district and city governments should ensure smoking ban at hotels, restaurants, offices and other public places. "Hotels and restaurants violating the smoking ban must be fined while serving of 'sheesha' at hotels and restaurants must be banned." He added that National Assembly should pass a resolution to ban 'sheesha' at restaurants, cafes and public places,

as it is extremely injurious to health. "Moreover, tobacco companies should be banned from using misleading terms such as "mild" a "light", "ultra-light" and "low tar" to describe their products."

Dr. Ashraf suggested that there should be comprehensive ban on loose cigarettes and 10-stick packs to curtail tobacco consumption among teenagers as the loose cigarettes and 10-stick packs are popular among teenagers and low-income group smokers. "Taxes must be increased manifold on tobacco products in order to increase its price beyond the reach of common men and youngsters." He added that advertising of tobacco products at points of sale must be banned. "Smoking ban in all educational institutions must be implemented and any student violating the ban must be expelled from the institution. Similarly, employees found smoking in offices must also be terminated from their services," said Dr. Ashraf.