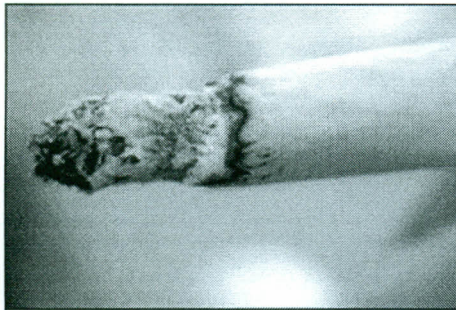


Smoking termed more lethal than suicide bombing



Smoking has turned out to be far more lethal than suicide bombings for Pakistan over the years. According to The Network, a consumer rights' protection organization, around 100,000 people die of tobacco-related diseases annually in Pakistan, while the number of lives claimed by suicide bombings over the last nine years comes to around 6,000.

Panelists at a discussion on smoking prevention and control on Monday had a unanimous opinion that until the current anti-smoking laws were enforced, smoking-free-Pakistan would be a distance dream.

Presenting a recent Asian Development Bank report, The Network's Advocacy and Research Coordinator Dr. Anwar Rafay said Pakistan had lost 5,704 lives to around 332 suicide bombings, which it witnessed since 9/11 terrorist attacks in the US. He said the country currently had around 25 million smokers, while the annual tobacco-related deaths were 98,640.

According to him, National Health Survey of Pakistan, 1990-94, and Pakistan Health Education Survey, 1999, stated 55 per cent of households had at least one smoker but the recent data had now shown that the problem had worsened. TN representatives said 40 per cent of men and nine per cent of women in the country smoked tobacco. He further said the annual per capita consumption of tobacco in the country was 392 cigarettes per adult annually.

He said media and anti-smoking advocates should collaborate for forcing government into implementing Framework Convention on Tobacco Control Guidelines and the Prohibition of Smoking and Protection of Non-Smokers' Health Ordinance, 2002.

Dr. Anwar alleged tobacco industry carried out hidden promotional activities despite strict ban. He said recently, his organization highlighted promotional activities of a tobacco giant in the flood-affected areas of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa under the garb of corporate social responsibility, but its coverage on media caused Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gilani to step in and order prompt halt to the activities. He praised journalists for helping The Network make Pakistan smoking-free and wanted them to do more for the cause.

Another speaker said around 12,000 new children in the age bracket of 6 to 15 began tobacco intake every day. He said tobacco companies should not be encouraged by media even if they did something for humanitarian grounds because it would indirectly promote them.