

BUSINESS RECORDER

Islamabad, Friday 9 October 2009, 19 Shawwal 1430

Call to implement pictorial health warnings on cigarettes

SHERISH WASIF

ISLAMABAD: While strongly reacting over the delay on the part of the authorities concerned, the Coalition for Tobacco Control (CTC) has appealed to the Prime Minister of Pakistan and Federal Minister for Health to speedily implement pictorial health warnings on cigarettes.

As it was due to issue the notification as soon as it decided to push the tobacco industry to come up with pictorial health warnings on cigarettes pickings stated Dr Arif Azad Chief Executive Officer TheNetwork, while addressing a press conference here on Tuesday.

He blamed that the Ministry of Health is delaying the deadline for implementing pictorial health warnings on cigarette packs.

He said that only 81 days were left in the given dead line to the tobacco industry, the Ministry of Health has still not notified the legislation that restricts the industry to comply with printing pictorial health warnings on cigarettes packs by January 1, 2010.

He said, "TheNetwork for the Consumer Protection along with the CTC apprehend that the tobacco industry is actively delaying

implementation of pictorial health warnings".

"Federal Minister for Health Mir Aijaz Hussain Jakhrani although made a historic announcement of introducing pictorial health warnings by January 1, 2010 but still the decision is yet to be implemented" he continued.

"The decision has put Pakistan on the list of lead countries that have introduced such a key and radical measure into domestic legislations in line with Pakistan's obligations under the Framework Conventions for Tobacco Control (FCTC) WHICH Pakistan signed in 2004" he noted.

He was of the view that in Pakistan where literacy rate is low, introduction of pictorial warnings on cigarettes packs would act as powerful tool in curbing tobacco use. "We are deeply concerned at the lack of progress towards implementing pictorial warnings four months after the announcement" he added.

"Despite the fact that the legislation has been prepared and has been vetted still there is no visible sign as yet of being it notified, Dr Azad lamented.

Speaking on the occasion Khurram Hasmi said, "although the industry claims that print-

ing pictorial health warnings on cigarettes packs is too expensive and it would take long time as the required technology for doing so is not available in the country are completely false and baseless".

He said an understanding of both the risks and severity of smoking are important factors in motivating smokers to quit and pictures based warnings can be effective in conveying the consumers about the risks involve in smoking.

While sharing some horrifying facts, he said, in Pakistan around 78 billion cigarettes are consumed annually and out of these 62 billions shares are hold by two leading tobacco companies in Pakistan, while the remaining 16 billion cigarette sticks are smuggled or marketed by the counterfeit or non-duty paid manufacturers.

"Smoking causes 100,00 deaths annually in Pakistan and any further delay in the notification and implementation of the warnings would add to the toll of the deaths caused by tobacco industry and the figure is mounting at a rate of 273 deaths daily" he warned "These frightening figures leave little room for delay and complacency" he added.