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India: PM's bravery awards "nothing to do with our products"

According to Godfrey Philips, the Indian subsidiary of Philip Morris that makes Red & White cigarettes, the emphasis of the Red & White bravery awards is "selfless action". The same phrase could hardly describe the company's motives for using the name of its cigarette brand instead of its company name for the scheme, whose well funded advertising campaign associates its cigarettes with bravery (see *Tobacco Control* 2002;**11**:10–11, 91). With not only the brand's name but also its distinctive colours used in the awards scheme promotions, and details of the cigarette brand just a click or two away from nauseating descriptions of the scheme on the company's website, one might have thought the manufacturers would be forced to admit to the connection. Recently, an opportunity arose for a little candour on the subject.

Faced with an all male list of award winners in the state of Maharastra, the Red & White judges added a special award for the highly publicity friendly "Bollywood" film star Preity Zinta. It recognised her bravery in sticking to her original story in a high profile court case in which a central theme of the prosecution was that key figures in Bollywood were linked to organised crime. Her steady testimony was all the more praiseworthy because other witnesses had withdrawn their earlier statements. Zinta claimed to have received threatening calls from the underworld while she was shooting for the film Chori Chori Chupke Chupke in 2000.

"Bollywood" film star Preity Zinta.

Not surprisingly, press reports of the case referred to sinister people who make vast sums of money from, among other things, peddling illegal, addictive drugs, without regard to the devastating effects on the health of those who consume them. Many journalists overlooked the fact that Red & White, even if not illegal, is a cigarette brand, energetically promoted by people who make vast sums of money, etc. But in an interview with *The Times of India*, it was put to Mr Sanjeev Verma, managing director of Godfrey Phillips, that the Red & White bravery awards were really a means of advertising Red & White cigarettes. Extraordinary as it may seem, he denied that the scheme had any connection with the brand. "The awards are a salute to bravery," he said. "They have nothing to do with our products."

Serbia: tough times ahead

In February, Yugoslavia became a federal state called the Republic of Serbia and Montenegro. Through times of war, internal strife and economic hardship, health has taken a back seat. Now Serbia, emerging from international isolation, is on the brink of another catastrophe—an epidemic of tobacco deaths.

In Serbia, every second man smokes, as does every third woman, and every fourth teenager. The past three decades have seen a dramatic increase in smoking among women, and among secondary school and college students. Cardiovascular diseases, cancer, and lung diseases—already the leading causes of death in Serbia—are rocketing.

Although Serbia has a thriving domestic tobacco industry, the transnational companies are not far behind. Alongside local brands, Serbs puff on Lucky Strike, Marlboro, and—for those who can afford it—Davidoff. In spring, Belgrade hosted its International Film Festival. The main sponsor was BAT.

As former Yugoslavia, the country was a key destination and shipment route for smuggled tobacco, and transnational tobacco companies have shown a keen interest in domestic production (see *Tobacco Control* 2002;**11**:92–3). Health interests campaigned for measures to curb domestic production, prevent transnational companies from taking control, and ban all tobacco advertising. New tobacco legislation enacted in February provides low interest loans for tobacco growing and manufacturing and a licensing system for tobacco manufacturers. The transnationals seem poised to pounce.

While the legislation may go some way towards combatting smuggling, it pays scant attention to health. The only provisions are to ban tobacco sales to under 18s, and require health warnings—size unspecified—on packs. The future of legislation to regulate tobacco advertising seems uncertain, following the assassination in March of the prime minister, Zoran Djindjic.

But some progress is being made. A National Commission for Prevention of Smoking has been formed, and a campaign launched in partnership with government and NGOs. Support has come from the World Health Organization, the European Agency for Reconstruction, the Canadian International Development Agency, and UNICEF. Philip Morris also offered its help—and was refused.

The first phase of the campaign concentrates on health professionals, in the hope that their lead will influence others. The target may not seem easy: more than one in three doctors (37%), and one in two nurses (52%) smoke. More than four out of 10 (42%) family doctors and one in four (25%) paediatricians smoke. But more than eight out of 10 (85%) have tried to stop, citing in the main health concerns—and just as many say they advise their patients to quit.

Concern about the health effects of smoking is high: 85% of smokers are worried about the effect of second-hand smoke on children, and 75% of smokers worry about their own health. The campaign aims to tackle both these concerns, by targeting the

protection of non-smokers and encouraging smokers to quit.

A 1995 law, poorly respected, restricts smoking in public places. Health institutions are drawing up action plans to make their premises smoke-free, and information posters and signs are being distributed. Counselling services and information for smokers encourage and support quitting, and leaflets for non-smokers give advice on how to help.

A public information campaign has also begun, with spots on state and private television, radio jingles, and billboards urging smokers to quit. On national No Smoking Day at the end of January, hoards of smokers exchanged their cigarettes for fruit at a large tent in central Belgrade.

Halting the tidal wave of smoking induced illness that seems set to engulf Serbia in the next few decades seems a tough order. But in a country battered and impoverished by economic flux, conflict, and political instability, tobacco control seems the only prescription.

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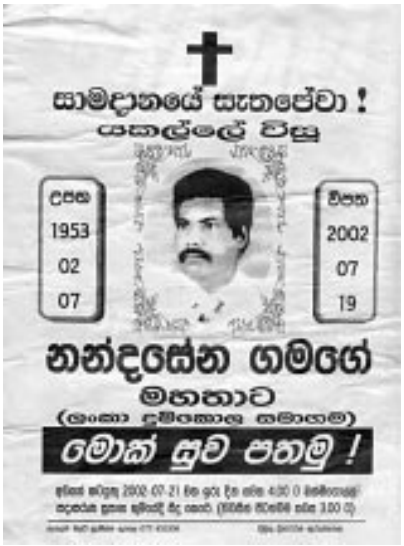
USA: Big Tobacco and the lighter side of security

One of the more bizarre accounts of the tobacco industry's influence on the Bush administration in the USA emerged recently from Michael Moore, film maker, journalist, and best selling author of the satirical and less than flattering book about his country, *Stupid white men*. Moore revealed that during a nationwide book promotion tour, he had asked his audiences if they knew the answer to a question that was increasingly bothering him. As he flew from city to city, he repeatedly passed through airport security checks. At each one, he dutifully emptied his pockets of anything that might be considered a potential security threat, in the climate of greatly increased security awareness following the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001.

Penknives, nail files, knitting needles, even toenail clippers were among the long list of items prohibited in hand baggage, yet Moore noticed that cigarette lighters and matches were not—even after a British passenger, on 22 December that same year, unsuccessfully tried to set fire to his shoes with a lighter, shoes whose heels were packed with explosives, police said later. Did anyone know, Moore asked his audiences, why on earth cigarette lighters, one of which had already been used in an attempted suicide bomb attack high over the Atlantic, were missing from such a comprehensive security list, especially since smoking was now prohibited on all flights?

Moore finally got his answer at an event in a bookshop in Arlington, Virginia, just a few miles from the Pentagon, target of one of the hijacked aircraft in the 11 September attacks. As Moore signed copies of his book after giving his talk, a young man approached him, introduced himself, and said in a lowered voice that he could answer the question, as he worked on Capitol Hill, centre of the federal government administration in Washington DC. Butane lighters were on the original list prepared by the Federal Aviation Authority (FAA) and sent to the White House for approval, he said, but the tobacco industry successfully lobbied the Bush administration to have lighters and matches removed from the banned list.

Perhaps the industry's rationale was not just based on concern for their customers, many of whom would want to smoke again as soon as possible after a flight, preferably without having to buy another lighter. They may also have feared the association of smoking paraphernalia with potential instruments of death, another inch lost on the slippery slope of social acceptability. Even more interesting, maybe it had occurred to them that if smokers did not immediately light up on arrival, some might get all the way to their destinations without smoking at all—and then what? They might even seize the opportunity to give up for good.



The death notice of the late Mr Nandasena Gamage, who worked for BAT's Sri Lankan subsidiary, CTC, as a tobacco quality taster. Earlier this year, Mr Gamage died after contracting lung cancer, leaving a widow and two children, one of them disabled. After his death, CTC reportedly paid compensation to his family, who have since declined to speak to journalists about their tragedy.

Michael Moore has filed a demand under the Freedom of Information Act, asking the FAA to provide him with all relevant documentation about the decisions that were made to allow butane lighters and matches on board passenger aircraft. Don't hold your breath waiting for a full and frank response, Mr Moore.

Sri Lanka: film's big puff for smoking

Product placement of cigarettes in movies is nothing new, though for a time, following the publication of hard evidence of tobacco companies' efforts to get their cigarettes into popular movies in the hands of young people's screen idols, there was a temporary reduction in this insidious form of promotion. It has crept back again, of course, if with a little more subtlety than before. In Sri Lanka, though, an extraordinarily overt promotion of smoking was a major and continuing theme in a recent box office success, whose Sinhala name *Thani thatuven piyabana* translates as *Flying with one wing*.

The Sri Lankan film, *Flying with one wing*, overtly promotes smoking.

The main character in the film is a woman who lives the life of a man. "He" smokes throughout the film, saying that smoking is one of the characteristics of masculinity. Other scenes seem to have the express purpose of promoting smoking—a girl who tells her boyfriend, who has put out his cigarette when she arrives, "Why did you put out your cigarette? I like men who smoke"; and a doctor who offers