

# Tactics against tobacco law amendment

**PROFESSOR DR. MD. ABDUL AZIZ, MP**



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina announced on January 31, 2016, in the closing speech of the South Asia Speakers Conference,

to eradicate tobacco use from Bangladesh by 2040. For that purpose, the Ministry of Health has taken the initiative to amend the current Tobacco Control Act and formulated the final draft law.

The final draft was circulated on the Ministry of Health's website for public opinion polls on the mid of the 2022. Where 169 members of Parliament, Vice Chancellor of various universities and about 16,000 dignitaries voted in favor of amending the law. On the other hand, only 1100 people voted against amending the draft law in the name of fake and anonymous organizations of tobacco companies.

Whereas, According to the report of Global Adult Tobacco Survey (GATS) the number of people who do not smoke but are indirectly exposed to the harm of smoking is about 40 million, which is almost double the number of direct smokers.

More than 5.8 million people die worldwide each year due to smoking, which is one in every 10 people. Frustratingly Bangladesh alone, more than 161,000 people die prematurely every year due to tobacco use, average which is 442 people a day! Analyzing these data, we can understand how terrible tobacco is!

Whenever any initiative is taken by the government to control tobacco, TT's (Tobacco Industry) takes strategic move to influence the government and policy makers against the draft law by providing fabricated, and misleading information by

utilizing their paid media outlets and even the civil society leaders to create negative public opinion by questioning the positive initiatives and actions of the government.

Meanwhile, tobacco companies are protesting the amendment of the law on some points which are TT's counter logic to the law amendment/ essentially baseless. One of these is that the ministry has presented draft proposals for amending the

gross violation of FCTC Article 5.3. Article (5.3) provides guidance on keeping tobacco control activities free from tobacco company influence. Strict monitoring laws are also needed to stop all fraudulent activities of tobacco companies.

On the other hand, the tobacco companies are claiming that about 1.5 million retail traders in the country will become jobless if the draft law proposed to

the proposed amendments to the Act Law. So that their opportunity to harm public health may be ensured and not impeded by the proposed amendment of the law!

On the other hand, traders and related organizations such as E-Commerce Association of Bangladesh E-CAB, Supermarket Owners Association, Bangladesh Inland Navigation (Passenger Transport) Association, Bangladesh Restaurant Owners Association and professional associations like Bangladesh United Workers Federation-BSSF Top organizations have expressed their support for amending the Tobacco Act.

It should be noted that the aim of tobacco control laws is not to protect the business interests of tobacco companies, but to protect public health from the harmful effects of tobacco. And the goal of tobacco companies is to increase the consumption of tobacco products day by day and expand the trade. Ultimately that puts public health at serious risk and will continue to do so in the future.

The government is working regularly to control tobacco products by making laws. So that the use of tobacco products is discouraged. Not only tobacco products, the government is playing a very vocal role in banning the sale, marketing and importation of e-cigarettes. In order to take more strict measures in this regard, I feel that the amendment draft of the Tobacco Control Act adopted by the Ministry of Health needs to be passed soon.

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law without taking the views of the stakeholders. On review, it can be seen that among these excluded stakeholders are tobacco companies and some of their so-called loyal organizations.

However, there is no minimum chance for tobacco companies to be considered as stakeholders in the process of the amendment of tobacco laws. Article 5.3 of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), endorsed by the World Health Organization, states, "States have the obligation to exempt tobacco companies and their affiliates from influencing the adoption and implementation of tobacco control policies in national law".

As Bangladesh is the first signatory to the FCTC, companies have no say in Bangladesh's tobacco control laws. Any opportunity to express opinion would be a

further amend the Smoking and Use of Tobacco Products (Control) Act 2005 is passed and implemented. Which is completely baseless. It is worth noting that no shopkeeper makes a living exclusively by selling only tobacco products. It can be said for sure that no shopkeeper or trader will be out of business or jobless if the sale of just one product is stopped.

As an example, it can be said that before the construction of Padma Bridge or Jamuna Bridge, various jobs were created for lakhs of people in those regions. However, after the construction of the bridge, those jobs have stopped. However, no one has become unemployed, rather everyone has found alternative employment.

They seek opportunities to make suggestions opposing the various clauses of