

Worldwide news and comment

INDONESIA: EXPOSÉ ON TOBACCO INDUSTRY INTERFERENCE

Indonesia has a notorious reputation when it comes to tobacco control. While there are many reasons, nothing is as compelling as direct tobacco industry interference in the legislative process. An Indonesia weekly, *Tempo*, in an investigative report in the 27 June–2 July issue, recounts a series of extraordinary events in the Indonesian parliamentary process in recent years. According to *Tempo*, the tobacco industry is behind these shenanigans in parliament.

Among other events, a clause on the addictive nature of tobacco mysteriously disappeared from an approved health bill. The *Tempo* report is also damning of how a new draft tobacco bill has been 'smuggled' into parliament for inclusion in the 2013 programme of national legislation (Prolegnas) for debate. *Tempo* reports how the chair of the legislating body himself submitted the draft bill and there seems to be an urgency to push this industry-friendly bill—which replaces an earlier tobacco control bill dropped by parliamentarians because it was not considered a priority.

Apparently parliamentary procedure was not followed in how this new draft bill has been introduced. It was not supported by an academic paper which is a requirement of legislation, and is therefore marked with a 'star' to indicate it still needs more information and further studies. However, some supporters of the bill among the law makers have already started campaigning in favour of it in the provinces. Calling this a 'manoeuvre', *Tempo* accuses the legislators of clearly moving in the opposite direction of tobacco control advocates and public health.

Tempo quotes political faction leaders claiming this bill is sponsored by the tobacco industry; specifically PT Sampoerna, which is owned by Philip Morris International (PMI). Although the chair of the legislating body has denied this, previous events seem to lend support

to this allegation. The chair has been invited several times by Sampoerna for briefings and discussions on the importance of tobacco and farmers. In July 2011 he was invited to speak in a forum on the need to protect tobacco farmers and the industry. A few days before that forum, the legislating body met to discuss a letter from the Indonesian Tobacco Community Alliance (AMTI), which had submitted a draft bill on controlling tobacco products.

AMTI is a cigarette industry association established in 2010 by Sampoerna and other cigarette factories and the tobacco farmers association.

Sampoerna is acknowledged as the largest financial supporter of AMTI's activities in conducting seminars, publishing pamphlets, and mobilising farmers to protest regulations deemed to be detrimental to the industry. AMTI's role as a local platform to support industry interference in the fourth Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) Conference of the Parties (COP4) has previously been documented in the November 2012 issue of Tobacco Control (*Tobacco industry's ITGA fights FCTC implementation in the Uruguay negotiations*).

This is not the first time Sampoerna has attempted to initiate a draft bill in parliament. In 2010, *Tempo* reports Sampoerna proposed a draft bill on controlling the impact of tobacco to be added to the 2009–2014 National Legislative Program. This measure was rejected (for reasons that were not specified).

In 2009 a clause on the addictiveness of tobacco disappeared from the revised health law after it was approved by Parliament. According to *Tempo*, the chair of the health commission was responsible for the clause being 'stolen'. It reappeared only after tobacco control advocates raised the issue and filed an official complaint with the police. A government regulation based on the Indonesian health law has now been approved which will require all cigarette packs to carry 40% pictorial health warnings from July 2014 onwards.

An indication of how explosive the *Tempo* expose was can be seen in this issue of the magazine reportedly disappearing from the streets by noon on the day it was published. Indonesia enjoys freedom of the press, which is important for tobacco control advocates trying to keep tabs on tobacco industry interference. The advocates have now filed an official complaint with the national Anti-Corruption Agency (KPK) urging the agency to investigate the disappearance of the issues.

Though companies such as PMI and BAT finally concede that 'smoking is addictive and causes many serious diseases', the fact is that when a government in a country such as Indonesia—with a population of around 65 million smokers and 200 000 smoking-related deaths per year—proceeds to enact legislation to protect public health, the industry continues to mobilise its immense resources to defeat these measures and protect its business. Plus ça change...

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MALAYSIA: WATERPIPE TOBACCO SMOKING DECLARED 'HARAM'

With a population of just over 225 000, the smallest state in Malaysia has publicly declared that the sale and consumption of waterpipe tobacco, known locally as shisha, is now 'haram' or forbidden by Islamic law. The Fatwa Committee of Perlis, a region that lies at the northern aspect of the west coast of Peninsular Malaysia, made the declaration in late June 2013 on the grounds that shisha is more harmful than cigarettes. The committee did not specify the research consulted to reach this conclusion.

Although shisha is not yet legally banned in Perlis, two other states in the country (Malacca and Kelantan) imposed bans on shisha in 2011 after considering the balance of evidence. Perlis' edict places the religious stance towards shisha on par with alcohol and pork consumption, and now calls for a nationwide ban on the product have been issued. 'We noticed that this substance is popular among students, especially those at institutions of higher learning in Perlis,' a spokesperson explained.

Indeed, a publication by Al-Naggar & Saghir in the 2011 *Asian Pacific Journal of Cancer Prevention*, found that 30% of Malaysian university students are current shisha smokers. In 2012, Yen *et al* published in the *International Journal of Public Health Research* that Malaysian teenagers were also highly subject to this form of smoking, citing reduced harm perceptions, cheap price and attractive flavours as key drivers for use. This corroborates with other international publications, where rising prevalence is seen alongside the perception that shisha is considered a safe alternative to cigarettes.

These states of Malaysia do not appear isolated in their reaction against the growing threat of waterpipe tobacco

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