

# Latest Achievement of Bangladesh: Graphic Health Warning Implementation and Plea to Hike Tobacco Price and Tax



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**I**mplementation of graphical health warning (GHW) and imposition of higher tobacco taxes are globally considered as the most effective ways to control tobacco use. The international treaty—the World Health Organization (WHO) Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), has made it mandatory for the Parties to the Convention to implement GHW on tobacco packets (Article 11) and impose higher taxes on all types of tobacco products (Article 6).

Implementation of GHW on tobacco products' packets is a non-price measure to reduce tobacco demand. The government of Bangladesh, to comply with the FCTC Article 11, has made it mandatory to print GHW on tobacco packets covering upper 50% of packets and containers by amending the tobacco control law in 2013. After 22 months, in March, 2015 the government finalized the rules of the issue. Tobacco companies were given a period of 12 months for preparation. After lots of struggling and numerous ups and downs, finally printing of GHW began in March 19, 2016 on all types of tobacco products' packets as a result of unified efforts by anti-tobacco activists. However, the cigarette companies have been printing the GHW on lower 50% space of the packets by pursuing a temporary facility from the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, which is unlawful.

Another way to reduce tobacco use is increasing the tobacco tax, a price measure to reduce tobacco demand. In the fiscal year 2016-17, a short-run but well-planned and rigorous tobacco tax campaign in Bangladesh played a significant role in the process of imposition of higher taxes on tobacco products. During the same period, due to higher taxation, the prices of tobacco products have increased; the price of cheap cigarettes increased by 28%, the price of bidi increased by 50%. Prices of smokeless tobacco (SLT), i.e. gul and zarda have increased by 66%. The rate of price increase has surpassed the combined increasing rate of last five years. However, the prices of high-end cigarettes have not increased and no notable change in the existing tobacco tax structure is observed. During the past years, anti-tobacco organizations implemented some dispersed measures only right before the preparation of the national budget to influence relevant government bodies for increased tobacco taxation (Article 6 of the FCTC). But those unplanned measures were failure due to strong interference of tobacco companies.

Despite strong interference of the tobacco companies, GHW was introduced in the scheduled time and tax on tobacco increased remarkably in the fiscal year 2016-17 as a result of comprehensive campaign with the combined efforts of anti-tobacco activists. The achievements are described in detail below.

## Case 1: Implementation of graphical health warning



‘Graphical health warnings on cigarette packages are a direct, cost-effective means of communicating information on health risks of smoking to consumers’<sup>1</sup>. health warning on tobacco packets is an effective tool in reducing tobacco use. A study has revealed that a cigarette smoker is exposed to a cigarette packet for 7000 times annually<sup>2</sup>.

Article 11 of the FCTC obliges 180 signatory countries including Bangladesh to introduce GHW<sup>3</sup>. Presently, over 80 countries have introduced GHW<sup>4</sup>. In line with the other countries, Bangladesh has also amended tobacco control law in 2013 to introduce GHW covering 50% of the spaces on both upper sides of tobacco packets<sup>5</sup>. But due to strong interferences from tobacco companies, the necessary rules to implement GHW took 22 months to develop. After continuous pressure from anti-tobacco activists, rules were finalized in March 19, 2015; nine images were selected to print on tobacco packets; among the nine, seven were for the smoking tobacco and two were for smokeless tobacco products. With a penalty provision of, not exceeding BDT 200,000 or a simple imprisonment upto six months or both, tobacco companies were allowed 12 months to implement GHW on tobacco packets. However, tobacco companies were dilly-dallying to follow tobacco control rules. Moreover, Bangladesh Cigarette Manufacturers Association (BCMA) appointed a renowned lawyer to influence relevant government bodies including the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs and the National Board of Revenue (NBR) for jeopardizing the GHW implementation process. In such contexts, the anti-tobacco platforms took initiative to run nationwide, continuous and combined campaigns to compel tobacco companies abide GHW rules from March 19, 2016.

Tobacco companies tried to delay the GHW implementation with many excuses. In such background, with call from the Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids (CTFK), Bangladesh, the higher officials of anti-tobacco platforms had attended a meeting on February 22, 2016. The meeting set two strategies and implementation techniques to force tobacco companies implement GHW in due time.

## Strategy

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1. Administering a nationwide combined campaign from February 22, 2016 to March 19, 2016 involving all stakeholders of tobacco control working across the country.
2. Designing the campaign in a way that would draw huge mass media attention.

Besides, if the GHW were not implemented by March 20, 2016, another meeting would be held immediately on the very next day, March 21, 2016, to set further activities.

## Activities

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Nationwide road-shows, leaflet distributions, human chain formation, discussion meetings, earned media and social media campaign and community radio publicity were the primary activities done. At the same time, the ill tactics of tobacco companies were revealed on the mass media and social media. Further, a factsheet was produced and distributed among the journalists and relevant stakeholders.

### *Exhibition*

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A day-long exhibition was organized with the images set by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare for tobacco packets and other images of tobacco-related diseases before the National Museum, Dhaka, on March 10, 2016. The invited guests included celebrities, renowned actors, members of parliament (MPs), tobacco control advocates, representatives from the civil society and the high officials of tobacco control organizations. The honorable guests expressed solidarity with the campaign, which was highlighted on mass media. Besides, some other exhibitions were also held in Bogra and Rajshahi with dummy cigarette packets containing pictorial warnings.



### *Discussion meeting with policymakers*

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A high-profile event was organized on March 12, 2016 where the honorable Minister for Health and Family Welfare, MPs, senior journalists, doctors and anti-tobacco advocates and activists were present. The event was lively with the participation of over a hundred



of participants. It was covered by most of the mainstream media with significant importance. An informative presentation was delivered on the event. The presentation described the necessity and benefits of GHW, existing situations, tobacco company interferences and finally the voice of the tobacco victims (VOTV). A folder with a set of resourceful reading materials was served to each of the participants. During the open discussion session, the Minister and MPs were set to face the journalists and anti-tobacco activists. The Minister pledged that GHW would be implemented from the set deadline<sup>6</sup>. Earlier, on March 8, 2016 a discussion meeting was organized in Dhaka where the Minister for Women and Children Affairs was invited.



### **Human Chain**

With the demand of GHW implementation in due time, seven to eight strong human chains were organized in important districts and divisional cities across the country. The human chains took place in Dhaka on March 8; subsequently, Sirajganj on 12 March, Rangpur and Rajshahion 14 March, Sylhet and Moulvibazar on 15 March also observed the human chain.



In the end a grand human chain organized on 16 March in Dhaka in front of the National Press Club. The human chains turned spontaneous and lively with active participation from the representatives of anti-tobacco organizations, journalists and civil society members. The human chains demonstrated banners, festoons and placards demanding the implementation of GHW. Press invitations before the human chain, media brief during the human chain and media release were distributed after the human chain. Each of the human chains generated huge media coverage.

### **Road-show**

Road-shows were organized in Dhaka, Sylhet and Chittagong with the demand for implementing GHW on tobacco packets after the enacted law on March 19, 2016 in Bangladesh. As a part of the road-show, five trucks moved around the important locations of the city for three days from 14 – 16 March, 2016 exhibiting the sample of GHWs with musical concert.



The band of Bauls (folk singers) upheld the importance of GHW and demanded to implement it within due time through their songs. A leaflet to raise mass awareness was prepared and distributed among people during the road-show. The road-show ended by a large combined human chain in front of the National Press Club on March 16, 2016. In the speech during human chain, tobacco control advocates, civil society member representatives, and officials of anti-tobacco platforms participated and expressed their supports on the issue. The road-show information was shared with the mass media by press release. BBC<sup>7</sup> and other mass media covered the issue with substantial attention.



Besides, road-shows were organized on 15 and 16 March, 2016 in Sylhet and Chittagong respectively to support the central campaign from divisional levels. The road-shows were inaugurated by the Mayor<sup>8</sup> and the Chief Executive Officer of Chittagong and Sylhet City Corporations, respectively. As part of the road-show, four trucks with musical concerts moved different populous areas of Sylhet and Chittagong city with the exhibition of GHW samples. The road-shows were participated and supported by local journalists and civil society members. The local mass media covered the issue with importance after the press releases were sent.

### Leaflet and factsheet

A leaflet was prepared and distributed among the pedestrians during the roadshows in Dhaka, Sylhet and Chittagong to raise mass awareness about GHW issue. Besides, a factsheet on GHW was produced. The legal bindings of GHW implementation and the delays of the tobacco companies to follow the law were presented on the factsheet. The factsheet was disseminated in different meetings, seminar and mass media during the campaign.



## Media Campaign



## Earned media

The campaign encouraged the journalists to prepare and publish/broadcast some special reports on implementation status of GHW on their respective media houses. A special workshop with participation of 30 Anti Tobacco Media Alliance (ATMA) journalists was organized. Besides, all the ATMA members (over 350) and gatekeepers (over 30) were also encouraged to air or print the relevant news by distributing factsheet and follow ups. During this time, some investigative reports with the headings like dillydally from tobacco companies<sup>9</sup>, recruitment of renowned lawyers by tobacco companies, delaying GHW implementation passage, Law Ministry favor on tobacco company etc. were published. Based on such investigative reports, a notable number of editorials and Op-Eds were published on mass media<sup>10</sup>.

## Social Media

Popular social media outlets were used in a well-planned manner aiming to raise a strong mass awareness for GHW and expose tobacco company's ill tactics centering GHW implementation. Besides, investigative reports, special reports, and other information related to ill tactics of tobacco companies published on mass media were disseminated on social media outlet - ([www.facebook.com/tobaccoindustrywatchbd](http://www.facebook.com/tobaccoindustrywatchbd)) for the convenience of relevant stakeholders. The posts, published on social media, were shared on individual as well as on public groups which helped to send message to a notable number of policymakers, civil society representative, public and private officials, journalists and tobacco control activists.

## Community Radio

A radio commercial was made to hasten GHW implementation. The commercial was aired on all community radios (16 at present) during March 15 – 16, 2016 for once every hour. The commercial focused on the legal bindings of GHW implementation and the punishment/fine for violation of the law.

## ***Revealing tobacco company ill tactics***

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Under the campaign, tobacco company ill tactics, related to GHW implementation, were immediately revealed to mass media, anti-tobacco organizations, civil society members and other stakeholders. Notably, favoring the tobacco companies, the Ministry of Law and Family Welfare issued permission to print GHW covering 50% lower space of cigarette packets on March 13, 2016 while Tobacco Industry Watch BD team of PROGGA (Knowledge for Progress) issued an alert on social media outlets and circulated an e-mail to all of the stakeholders<sup>11</sup>. Anti-tobacco organizations jointly expressed their resentful reaction on March 14, 2016 while the mass media picked the issue seriously<sup>12</sup>. However, finally the tobacco companies won and on March 16, 2016 the National Tobacco Control Cell (NTCC) under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare issued a public notice on the issue.

## **Result**

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### ***Immediate***

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- A significant number of media pieces were published/broadcasted backing the introduction of GHW on tobacco packets from March 19, 2016 by almost all of the mass media. After PROGGA's media monitoring data, during the campaign, 345 media pieces were published which was 11 times more than the same during last year.
- During the campaign, two ministers (the Minister for Health and Family Welfare and the Minister for Women and Children Affairs), 15 MPs, one city corporation mayor, five celebrities, at least 20 officials from local administration (Civil Surgeon, Upazilla Nirbahi Officer, Magistrate, Health Education Officer) among others were engaged. Besides, the mass media published/aired numbers of reports/news with opinions of at least 20 important policymakers and civil society representatives including ministers, MPs, relevant Secretary/Additional Secretary/Joint Secretary and public health expert, politician and economist.

### ***Finally***

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GHW on tobacco packets was introduced in due time – on March 19, 2016 due to joint efforts from anti-tobacco platforms and hard stance of mass media. However, the cigarette companies have trickily managed a temporary permission to print the GHW on lower 50% space of tobacco packets (though the law suggested printing the GHW covering the upper 50% space of tobacco packets). The campaign kicked off only a month before of March 19. If it could have been initiated at least two months before, it would have been possible to implement GHW on upper 50% space of tobacco packets.



*GHW approved by Health Ministry*

## Lessons learned

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Coordinated and combined efforts can compel tobacco companies to oblige tobacco control laws. In fact, this is not possible to get such a tremendous success for any organization without any unified effort. The learning could also be implied on other aspects of tobacco control.



## Conclusion

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Honorable Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, is pledged to make a tobacco-free Bangladesh before 2040<sup>13</sup>. Initiation of plain packaging is an important step to reach the goal. However, prior to that the GHW implementation should be ensured and at the same time, initiatives should be taken to expand the size of GHW on packets by 80-90% as practices in other countries<sup>14</sup>.



## Case 2: Increasing price and tax for tobacco products



### Introduction

Increasing tobacco price by imposing higher tax is the most cost-effective way to reduce tobacco use. “A well-planned tobacco tax system is an effective measure to reduce both tobacco use and tobacco related health damages globally” (WHO, 2010)<sup>15</sup>. Article 6 of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) instructs that the signatory countries may raise the price of tobacco products by imposing effective tax<sup>16</sup>. Some of the countries like Canada, France, Ukraine, South Africa, Mexico and Turkey have gained significant achievements over the issue<sup>17</sup>. Tobacco taxation exists in Bangladesh, but that is of no effect on tobacco price and cannot contribute on protecting public health. Besides, tobacco companies become gainer. Tobacco products are getting cheaper day by day in the country. Research found that availability of tobacco products has increased in 2015 compared to that of 2009 in Bangladesh and the increase was due to cheaper price of tobacco products<sup>18</sup>. Considering the situations, anti-tobacco organizations have conducted a combined campaign targeting the 2016-17 national budget to impose a higher tax on all types of tobacco products and formulate an effective tobacco tax policy by simplifying the existing complex tobacco tax structure.

### Strategy

Under the campaign, multipronged strategies have been applied in a very comprehensive and combined way. Presentation of research findings considering the legal bindings, VOTV presentation, unveiling tobacco company ill tactics, lobbying, mass media (paid and earned media) and social media have been used to influence the tobacco tax makers and develop public opinions for tobacco tax measures. Besides, the declaration from Honorable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to make the country tobacco-free by 2040 and her instructions to formulate an effective tobacco tax policy by simplifying existing complex tobacco tax structure has been used in all stages of the campaign<sup>19</sup>. Under a combined planning, anti-tobacco organizations implemented individual and joint activities.

## Activities

Using the aforesaid plans, a three-month long (April- June) activities were implemented.

<b>Campaign activities at a glance</b>	
<b>Activity</b>	<b>Strategies used</b>
Roundtable meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Presenting research findings and tobacco tax proposal</li> <li>Remembering legal bindings</li> <li>VOTV presentation</li> <li>Unveiling tobacco company ill tactics</li> <li>Remembering the Premiers directives</li> <li>Sending/ publishing press release on mass media</li> </ul>
Pre-budget press conference	
Meeting with tax makers: Honorable State Minister for Finance and Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lobbying</li> <li>Research findings presentation</li> <li>Remembering the Premiers directives</li> <li>Sending/ publishing press release on mass media</li> </ul>
Chairman, National Board of Revenue (two times)	
Member, VAT implementation and IT	
Meeting with economists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lobbying</li> <li>Unveiling tobacco company ill tactics</li> <li>Recalling Premier's directives</li> </ul>
Nationwide combined human chain in front of DC office and submitting memorandum to Finance Minister	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recalling Premier's directives</li> <li>Presentation of research findings</li> <li>Placing the proposed tax proposals</li> </ul>
Motivate Ministry for Health and Family Welfare for issuing letter to the NBR for higher taxation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DO letter issuing</li> <li>Recalling Premier's directives</li> <li>Placement of proposed tax proposals</li> </ul>
Human chain and memorandum submission against covert pre-budget meeting of NBR with tobacco companies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recalling directives from FCTC Article 5.3</li> <li>Human chain formation during the meeting</li> <li>Press release issuing on mass media for publication</li> </ul>
DO letter from MPs to Finance Minister	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recalling Premier's directives</li> <li>Lobbying</li> <li>Placement of proposed tax structure</li> </ul>
Pre-budget workshop with mass media person	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analysis presentation of proposed tax proposals</li> </ul>

Activity	Strategies used
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recalling the obligations of FCTC Article 5.3</li> <li>• Unveiling tobacco company ill tactics</li> <li>• Recalling directives of Premier</li> <li>• Follow up with trained journalists to publish/telecast reports</li> </ul>
<p><b>Unveiling tobacco company ill tactics (mass media and social media)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recalling obligations under Article 5.3 of FCTC</li> <li>• Publishing tobacco company's covert meeting with policymakers instantly on social media</li> <li>• Sending press release to mass media for publication</li> </ul>
<p><b>Campaign on mass media: Earn media campaign</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supplying necessary tobacco tax related documents to journalists/ATMA members</li> <li>• Providing immediate update on tobacco company ill tactics to the journalists</li> <li>• Offering fellowship for investigative journalism</li> <li>• Follow up fellows for regular report publications</li> <li>• Emailing the fellow report summaries to relevant stakeholders</li> </ul>
<p><b>Paid media campaign</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advertising on two leading national newspapers</li> <li>• Organizing talk show on a popular private TV channel</li> <li>• Producing thematic video clip based on the talk show theme</li> <li>• Publishing/ airing special report on a most circulated newspaper and TV channel</li> </ul>
<p><b>Social Media campaign</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Utilizing social media in a planned manner in the entire campaign</li> <li>• Deploy a skilled team for continuous support to run social media campaign</li> <li>• Supplying campaign updates on social media regularly</li> <li>• Providing immediate updates on tobacco company ill tactics</li> <li>• Publicizing reports published/ aired on mass media</li> <li>• Publicizing the overall campaign activities</li> </ul>

Activity	Strategies used
Lobbying	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hiring a lobbyist for lobbying with tax makers</li> <li>Placement of expected tax measure to tax makers and relevant people</li> </ul>
Steps after budget declaration: Immediate budget reaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Presenting budget analysis</li> <li>Press release sending to mass media</li> <li>Recalling Premier's directives</li> </ul>
Post-budget reaction	
Participation on budget discussion on National Parliament through MPs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tabling proposals on tobacco taxation on budget finalization discussion</li> </ul>
Meet with Finance Minister	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attracting Finance Minister's attention on having benefit of multinational company over unchanged tax on pricy cigarettes</li> <li>Greeting on adopted taxation on tobacco products</li> <li>Recalling the Premier's directives</li> </ul>

### Roundtable meeting

As a part of the campaign, a high-profile national level event was organized. About 100 of participants, including the State Minister of Finance, six influential MPs, two famous economists, twelve reputed health specialists, leaders of anti-tobacco organizations and fifteen senior journalists actively participated in the meeting. Mainstream mass media covered the issue with importance. Two informative presentations were delivered in the event. The first presentation represented analyzed data favoring tobacco tax hike (for example: the damages caused for tobacco use, problems of existing complex tobacco tax structure, tobacco tax analysis for last five years, cheap price and availability of tobacco products, cheapness of tobacco products than other necessary commodities like milk, egg, rice etc.) and legal bindings (FCTC). The second presentation dealt with the ill tactics of tobacco companies, for instance, tax evasion worth BDT 1,924 crores by BATB exploiting



the slab based tax, VOTV, and the Prime Minister's instructions about simplifying the existing tax structure through formulation of a strong tax policy. Besides, all the participants received a set of resourceful reading materials in a folder at the meeting. During the open floor discussion segment, the journalists and anti-tobacco activists asked important questions on tobacco taxation to the State Minister of Finance and MPs. Honorable State Minister for Finance and Planning pledged to impose a notable amount of tax on tobacco products in the budget of 2016-17 fiscal years in his speech.

### *Factsheet development*

*Based on the existing data, a factsheet was prepared to demand tobacco taxes unequivocally which was used by all of the anti-tobacco organizations. Besides, information from the factsheet was used to prepare presentation, press release and issuing letter to policymakers.*

### *Meeting with Economists*

The objectives and goals of the campaign were shared with the economists. During the meeting, the reasons for imposing higher tobacco tax, proposed tobacco tax structure and tax proposals, ill tactics of tobacco companies to undermine tax measures etc. were discussed in detail to gain support of the economists. Besides, the instructions of Honorable Prime Minister regarding tobacco taxation were also presented. The economists also urged to provide interview on the issue on mass media. All of them supported the existing tobacco control movement and tobacco tax advocacy campaign.

### *Meeting the tax makers*

Under the campaign, an initiative was adopted to meet the tax makers for effective taxation on all tobacco products including bidi and cigarettes in the fiscal year 2016-17. As part of the task, anti-tobacco leaders took attempts to meet Honorable State Minister for Finance and



Planning, Chairman and Member of National Board of Revenue (VAT implementation and IT) and the Minister for Health and Family Welfare. A written six-point demand was placed in the discussions including imposing a 70% tax on retail cigarette price, 40% on bidi and 70% excise tax on zarda. They assured the anti-tobacco representatives that they have been working under the instructions of

the premiers. The mainstream media published the reports of meetings after those were sent as press release.

### *Human chain and memorandum submission*

Human chains were formed in front of the DC offices in 64 districts on April 12 under the campaign. A memorandum was submitted to the Finance Minister through the DCs following the human chain. The human chains and memorandum demanded to formulate an effective



tax policy by simplifying the existing complex tax structure and imposing tobacco taxes considering per capita income rise along with some other demands. The human chains demonstrated banners, festoons and placards containing information on the damages caused for tobacco use and the pledges of the Premier on tobacco control. The information of campaign and tax proposal were submitted to the Finance Minister through the DCs.

### ***Letter to NBR through Ministry for Health***

The Ministry for Health was inspired to issue a letter to the NBR to impose higher taxes on tobacco products considering public health. The Secretary for Health issued a letter seeking attention of the NBR Chairman to adopt a stronger tax policy and to impose higher taxes on tobacco products in the budget of fiscal year 2016-17 as per the Premier's directives.

### ***Human chain and memorandum against the pre-budget covert meeting of NBR with tobacco company***

NBR had set April 24 to meet with the Cigarette Manufacturers' Association of Bangladesh (BCMA) at the conference room of NBR. Earlier, they shifted the pre-budget meeting twice on the protest of the anti-tobacco activists. A large human chain was organized on the day in front of NBR while the meeting was going on to protest the meeting that was a violation of FCTC Article 5.3. The human chain was participated by anti-tobacco representatives, journalists, and civil society members and it was highlighted on the mainstream mass media.



### ***DO letter to the FM by MPs***

About 25 MPs had issued DO letters to the Finance Minister urging to adopt a strong tax policy and to impose a higher specific excise taxes on the retail price of all types of tobacco products in 2016 -17. The anti-tobacco activists motivated the MPs for issuing DO letter to the Finance Minister.

### *Pre-budget meet with journalists*

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A pre-budget workshop was held with an analysis of the proposed tax for the fiscal year 2016–17 with the participation of journalists. Around 30 financial reporters from leading media houses participated at the workshop and later they published at least 50 reports on their respective media houses.

### *Pre-budget press conference*

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With combined effort of the anti-tobacco activists, on May 24, a press conference was arranged to present the proposals for an effective and extended taxation on tobacco products for 2016-17. The declaration of the Prime Minister towards a tobacco-free Bangladesh by



2040 was greeted and demands were placed to formulate an effective tax policy by simplifying the existing tax structure. The press conference was attended by the leaders of tobacco control organizations in line with the mass media activists. Almost all of the mass media of the country covered the issue with importance.

## Unveiling tobacco company ill tactics through social media and mass media



Under the campaign, ill initiatives by tobacco companies to hamper the tobacco taxation process was shared with the mass media, anti-tobacco organizations, civil society members and relevant others. Notably, British American Tobacco Bangladesh (BATB) had met with the Finance Minister in April 4 and 13, which is an important time for budget formulation but such meetings are not supported by the Article 5.3 of FCTC. Similarly, the tobacco company took initiative to meet with the Minister for Industries on March 29, and protesting that meeting, a post was shared on the social media. Later, based on mass media reports and objection from anti-tobacco activists, the meeting with the Minister for Industries was cancelled.

### Mass Media campaign

#### Earn media campaign

An earned media campaign demanding higher taxes on all tobacco products targeting budget of 2016 -17 was conducted. As part of the initiative, tobacco tax related information was provided to the journalists and continuous follow-ups were made to prepare and publish reports. Besides, fellowships were provided to three journalists to inspire investigative reports on tobacco company interferences that undermine tobacco tax measures. The fellow journalists worked under the supervision of two mentors. The fellow journalists published 12 investigative reports on their respective mass media. The investigative report headlines were like: SDGs under tobacco cos threats; Complex tax structure damaging expected goals; Secret attempts to halt tobacco tax; Govt. losing revenue for want of tax policy; State Minister issues DO letter favoring tobacco cos; Tobacco company liaison hampers taxation; Smuggle happens round the year- seized before the budget; Tobacco products becoming cheaper for complex price slab based taxation; Economists to hike tobacco tax in line with income rise; Gul-zarda-bidi cos; and Evading tax for complex tax structure.

#### Paid media

A paid media campaign was administered before the budget of 2016-17 to increase tax on tobacco products. Under this campaign, a total of 16 advertisements by 3X4 column inches on the first page of two leading national dailies (The Daily Samakal and The Daily Financial



Express) were published and a total of five television talk shows were telecasted on a popular television channel Ekattor TV. Two thematic video clips focusing the youths and low-income people were aired just before the discussion to run the talk shows in line with campaign. Besides, three special reports were published on the Daily Prothom Alo and two special reports on Ekattor TV. The campaign continued from May 9 to June 15, 2016.

### Social media

Social media, under this campaign, used in a planned way to create a strong mass opinion to impose a higher tax on tobacco products in 2016-17 to protect public health. A skilled team naming ‘Tobacco Industry Watch BD Team’ worked continuously to supply the campaign updates. In line with campaign updates, investigative reports published on mass media, special reports, information about the ill tactics of tobacco company etc. were also shared among the stakeholders on the social media outlet- [facebook.com/tobaccoindustrywatchbd](https://facebook.com/tobaccoindustrywatchbd). The posts were shared substantially on individual walls and public groups which helped to



reach a massive population, policymakers, civil society representatives, public and private officials, journalists and tobacco control activists.

### Lobbying

Lobbying with the relevant government bodies like NBR to impose effective taxes on all tobacco products were practiced. A junior tax lobbyist collected and analyzed relevant tax data and prepared tax proposals for lobbying with the relevant agencies.

## *Post-budget activities*

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### *Immediate budget reaction*

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A press release was issued to the mass media immediately analyze dafter the budget of 2016-17 declared on June 2, 2016. The Finance Minister was criticized on the budget reaction saying, “Finance Minister backs tobacco co again, budget deflects Premier’s directives to a tobacco-free Bangladesh” as the tax rate on pricy cigarettes was unchanged. However, the attempt to hike price of cheap cigarettes, bidi and smokeless tobacco like gul and zarda was greeted. Majority of the leading daily and regional newspapers published the reaction with notable importance.

### *Post-budget press conference*

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Anti-tobacco organizations, on June 12, arranged a combined post-budget press conference to present the detail analysis of proposed tobacco tax measures for the fiscal year 2016-17 budget. An economist, representing the anti-tobacco activists, presented the written statement to the journalists describing the analysis. Mass media highlighted the issue with importance. The press conference mentioned that the multinational tobacco companies had been relieved again by unchanging tax rate of pricy cigarettes by ignoring the risks of public health. Considering the per capita income rise, this was an extreme anti-public health decision. Similarly, there would be no revenue generation from this tire of cigarettes. The Prime Minister instructed to formulate an effective tobacco tax structure/policy and its implementation to reduce purchasing power of tobacco products and increasing the revenue from tobacco as part of making Bangladesh tobacco-free by 2040. Yet there were no attempts to simplify tax structure on the proposed budget. A slight increase was found on cheap cigarette tax rate but the initiative to hike price of bidi and smokeless tobacco was praiseworthy, informed the press conference.

### *Meeting with Finance Minister*

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An influential MP and Inter Parliamentary Union President had a meeting with the Finance Minister on June 25 and greeted him for the attempts to impose increased taxes on tobacco products. Besides, he also drew attention for the unchanged condition of high and premium brands, which would make a room for benefit for the giant tobacco companies. The Finance

Minister hinted that there would be a slight hike of price on the premium brands as well on the final budget. Later, a 1% SD was increased (from 62% to 63% and 64% to 65% ) for high and premium brands but the prices remained unchanged.

## Results

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### Immediate

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- Almost all of the mass media houses published/aired a significant number of reports/news on tobacco tax and tobacco tax related interferences. After the media monitoring report of PROGGA, during the three-month campaign (April, May and June), there were 1769 reports published/aired which is 1.5 times more than that of during the last year.
- During the campaign, 10 renowned economists, 15 health specialists, 20 senior journalists, 10 MPs, one Minister (Finance Minister), one State Minister (Minister for Finance and Planning), current and former Chairman of NBR, 10 relevant government officials (NBR, National Tobacco Control Cell and Department of Agriculture Extension) were included in different events, talks shows and special reports.
- Under the paid media campaign, the 3X4 column inch advertisement was published by eight days on each of the two of the leading dailies – The Daily Samakal (prints 325,000 copies daily) and The Financial Express (prints 39,000 daily). By this 16 days, the message was sent around over 2.9 million readers. Besides, the advertisement was shared on the social media page - <https://www.facebook.com/tobaccoindustrywatch.bd> and other group<sup>20</sup> pages which also helped to share it to over 2000 people. Moreover, being inspired by the campaign, two of the senior journalists published post-editorials on their respective newspapers. The post-editorials were – ‘Price hike to benefit all’<sup>21</sup> and ‘Tobacco Control at Crossroad: Increase Tax, Save Life’<sup>22</sup> on the Daily Samakal and an English Daily – The Asian Age on May 24 and 26, respectively. Such publications have played an important role to build public opinion of tobacco tax hike.

### Finally

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The prices of cheap cigarettes, bidi and smokeless tobacco went up by 28%, 50% and 66%, respectively in 2016-17 due to increased taxation. It is noted that this single increase is more than the combined increase of last five years. However, due to the influence of multinational tobacco companies on different ministries including Industry and Finance, there were ineffective taxation on high and premium brand cigarettes. The final budget had increased the tax on high and premium brand by 1%, which in fact had no impact on their price hike. Besides, there were no initiatives to simplify the existing tobacco tax structure.



## Limitations

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Though the campaign was conducted for three months from April to June, most of the activities were conducted in May. If the activities could have been started a few months before, there would have some changes in the existing tobacco tax structure.

## Learning

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A comprehensive and coordinated tobacco tax advocacy campaign can influence the government bodies like NBR and Ministry of Finance for increased tobacco taxation. Any single organization or all organizations in disorganized manners may not get success. The lessons could be used in future for adopting any tobacco tax related campaign or any other tobacco control activities.

## Conclusion

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Honorable Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, has declared to make Bangladesh tobacco-free by 2040<sup>23</sup>. To achieve the goal, a strong advocacy with the relevant ministries/agencies is required for adopting a combined strategy and its implementation following the Premier's instruction to adopt a strong tobacco tax policy by simplifying the existing tobacco tax structure. The price slab for cigarette, tariff value for bidis, and ex-factory price system for gul and zardashave to be removed and a unified specific excise tax should be imposed on all tobacco products.



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