

# Why Indian films *will lead the world* on October 2, 2005.

**f**orty percent of India's total health budget is consumed by tobacco-related diseases, which kill 800,000 Indian adults annually. Meanwhile, India's state-subsidized film industry is helping to addict their young replacements. *What's wrong with this picture?*

## Clear tobacco off the screen now.

How serious is the problem? Three out of four Indian films now feature tobacco. Cigarettes pushed by foreign firms are showing up on screen more often. The stars are brandishing packets from Philip Morris or British American Tobacco (BAT).

Tobacco product placement in Hollywood is exhaustively documented. So are tobacco industry efforts to conceal and deny it. Isn't it conceivable that the same influences are at work in Bollywood?

The tobacco industry has not invested millions in the global film industry because it cares about art or culture. It aims to get around ad restrictions in other media.

A decade of research in the U.S., Australia and other nations finds smoking scenes are powerful lures. For example, a two-year study found that U.S. adolescents who see the most



smoking in films are three times as likely to start smoking. Hollywood movies recruit *half* of new young smokers—390,000—in the U.S. alone.

Why would India be any different? Seventy-nine percent of U.S. movies feature tobacco; seventy-six percent of Indian films do. As any parent knows, India's teens are as swayed by commercial trends as kids anywhere. Rural youth, with less education, are even more likely to be influenced by films than urban youth.

The single most effective way to reduce future deaths is to reduce kids' exposure to

smoking on screen. Half of those who start smoking in India are less than fifteen years old.

## Tobacco kills. Like mosquitoes spreading malaria, movies are a disease vector for tobacco.

Bhopal is the classic example of industry acting recklessly and evading responsibility. Yet, in terms of deaths, today's tobacco crisis in Bollywood far exceeds it. The thousands of adolescents recruited to use tobacco each month are a costly burden on India's future.

The Ministry of Health's straightforward proposal to clear the screens of tobacco gives everyone in Bollywood the chance to be the heroes and heroines we truly believe they are.

## Backed by Indian law, international agreement and scientific consensus.

Indian law bars tobacco advertising and promotion. On-screen smoking is proven to be promotional and directly benefits the tobacco industry. We prefer that the death-dealing stop and that future damage claims be avoided. We support the Ministry's *forward-looking* remedy. Let the past go—make *future* films smokefree.

International health authorities agree. The question is not *if* films will be smokefree; only *when*. India's largest generation in history is coming of age. Equipped with a powerful policy tool to stem the tobacco epidemic, it is natural, indeed inevitable, for India to take the lead.

'SMOKING IN THE MOVIES is a major problem worldwide because it represents such a powerful promotional force. It not only encourages children to begin smoking but reinforces tobacco industry marketing images that smoking is a way to increase your social status as adults.'

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION (Geneva)

Bollywood leaders can appreciate such an opportunity to set the global film standard. For everyone in India, this is a once-in-a-lifetime chance to make an historic contribution to world health. For those still uncertain, four points:

- 1] PROBLEM:** Movies with smoking are toxic on a mass scale. The scientific case is as solid as tobacco's link to cancer.
- 2] SOLUTION:** Clear tobacco off the screen.
- 3] 'SELF-REGULATION' WON'T WORK:** It protects the industry, not the audience. Pledges, expedient loopholes and PR campaigns will *not* reduce exposure to on-screen smoking—the only way to avert addiction and disease.
- 4] URGENCY:** Every month of delay costs India years of suffering and death.

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