

May 31 was observed as no-smoking day worldwide. **Najam-ud-din** talks to experts about

The dangers of smoking

The fact that smoking reduces an individual's life expectancy and exposes him to numerous health hazards is now well documented.

Half of all cancer cases in Pakistan are due to smoking; one-third of women with cancer suffer from the disease due to smoking; it is also the reason for one-fourth of all heart attacks worldwide. Over 90 per cent of lung cancer patients are smokers, so the damage caused by smoking is never-ending.

World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that about four million deaths worldwide are due to tobacco-related diseases each year and the figure is set to double by 2015.

These may be risks that the smokers choose to expose themselves to, but in the process they also expose others to the health hazards associated with smoking. Others who did not opt for those risks — but suffer from them due to passive smoking.

Passive smoking is the involuntary inhalation of cigarette smoke by non-smokers. Non-smokers who share living and working space with smokers run the risk of falling prey to all the diseases smokers are vulnerable to. New evidence shows that parental smoking contributes to higher rates of sudden infant death syndrome as well as asthma, bronchitis, colds and pneumonia in children. Infants of parents who smoke are also prone to respiratory infections.

No wonder that last year WHO changed the term passive smoking to forced smoking. The organisation termed forced smoking a violation of human rights by pointing out that it forced a person to, who did not want to, smoke.

Dr Syed Khursheed-uz-Zaman, a chest specialist at Gulab Devi Hospital says non-smokers exposed to cigarette smoke share the same fate as active smokers. "If a non-smoker stays in an office for eight hours where a person smokes 10 cigarettes, the effect on the

smoking. "Our media glorifies smoking. In all advanced countries, and even in India, cigarette advertisements are not allowed on TV. However, in Pakistan these ads are still shown," he adds.

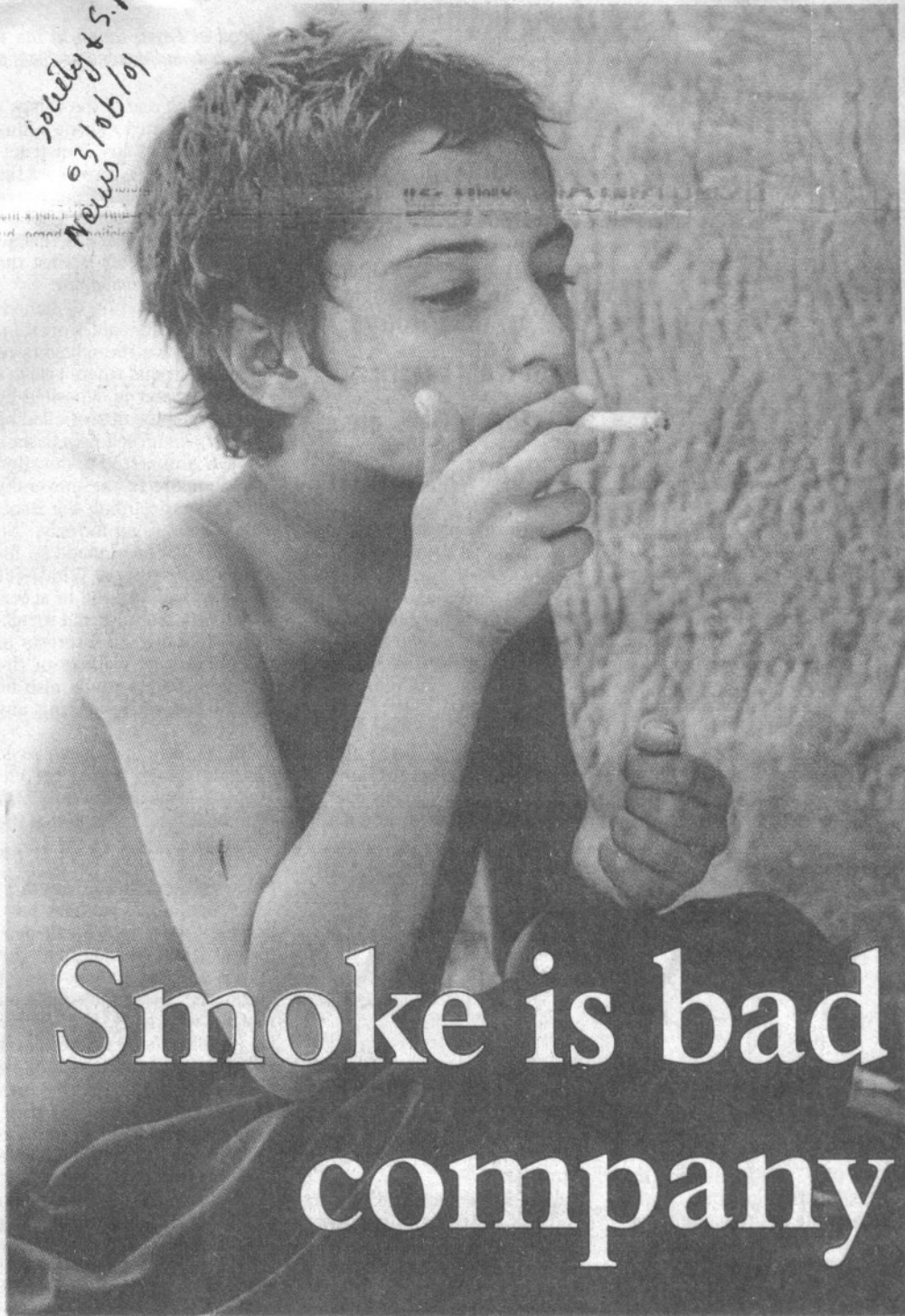
"The cigarette companies," he says "are targeting the youth as potential customers and the electronic media plays an instrumental role."

He says, "Audio-visual methods and television channels should instead be used to tell people that you kill yourself by

If a non-smoker stays in an office for eight hours where a person smokes 10 cigarettes, the effect on the non-smoker would be the same as if he actually smoked four cigarettes himself. The passive smoker would also be exposed to all the hazards the active smoker faces when he opts to smoke.

Smoke is bad company

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e-Pakistan welcomes you to the city. WHO's phase-out campaign set certain targets for the fight against smoking. The targets included banning smoking in public places, printing warnings on the cigarette packets and prohibiting under-age cigarette sales. One of the targets was also that big billboards and hoarding carrying cigarette advertisements should not be allowed. In Europe these billboards were banned three years ago but they are now coming to Pakistan," he adds.

Smoking for many is socially determined — they do it because everyone else they know smokes, many do it to ward off depression and others because they think it makes them look cool and confident.

"Socially too, smoking has not been handled too well. If there are 10 people in a room and nine are smoking, the one who is not smoking would be apologetic," Dr Khursheed points out.

A heart specialist at Jinnah Hospital, Dr Rakhshinda Zafar says, "What smoking can do to your heart and lungs is well known. It decreases life expectancy by 40 per cent in a large number of cases, enhances the risk of a heart attack and generally affects the quality of life of the smoker. But the passive smoker is at no less a risk."

According to her, though smoking is widespread in Pakistan, local research and statistics on the number of smokers or the various health hazards or deaths caused by smoking or passive smoking are practically non-existent. Whatever data we have, comes from the research of international organisations.

"Forums should be established for conducting research so the extent and magnitude of the smoking and the hazards it causes can be gauged and preventive measures taken," Dr Rakhshinda argues.

"Even in this age, so few Pakistanis have access to the Internet and international TV channels. In the absence of such information avenues, the national electronic media and mass circulation newspapers have a great role to play in creating awareness about smoking and its risks and putting passive smokers at their guard," she adds.

Islam also protects the rights of the non-smokers. A Hadith of the Holy prophet (PBUH) says, "Neither harm yourself nor others." Edicts of a number of Muslim scholars declare

10 cigarettes, the effect on the non-smoker would be the same as if he actually smoked four cigarettes himself. The passive smoker would also be exposed to all the hazards the active smoker faces when he opts to smoke. He is exposed to carcinogens — the substances that cause cancer — obstructive pulmonary disease, lung, throat, lip, larynx, esophagus and other cancers and coronary diseases.

Dr Khursheed is contemptuous of the media treatment of

people that you kill yourself by smoking.”

A floral show in Lahore on the occasion of Jashan-e-Baharan this year was sponsored by a cigarette manufacturing company. Cigarette companies are also sponsoring musical shows and concerts. Dr Khursheed thinks that by sponsoring such events, cigarette makers are able to target the youth.

“The Pakistani anti-smoking lobby is not organised or vocal.

Recently, a leading cigarette manufacturer in Pakistan launched a campaign that involved a world tour by sea. When the ship bearing the cigarette company's emblem reached Bangladesh, it was welcomed by black flags and stoned by anti-smoking group activists. It was not allowed to dock at Chittagong,” the doctor relates.

Dr Khursheed says, “Our celebrities — including a very notable film star and a

renowned pop singer actually running build charity hospitals instrumental in smoking by appealing to cigarette ads. This is a form of hypocrisy you can

And its not just icons in commercial electronic media, a cigarette smoking where. “When you see a huge billboard cigarette advertisement

singer — who are
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ers. Edicts of a number of
Muslim scholars declare tobacco
haram as it is addictive and for-
bid it as the habit harms health
and suicide is *haram* in Islam.

Pakistan must adopt a range
of stringent tobacco control
measures including a ban on
smoking in public places and
commuter vans and buses. This
ban should be strictly imple-
mented. At the same time, mar-
keting and advertisement of
tobacco should be to prevent a
potentially dramatic rise in
tobacco-related deaths. ♦