

### UNB Report

Nearly a year after receiving the draft rules of the amended Smoking and Tobacco Products Usage (Control) Act, the Law Ministry has recently vetted the draft rules and sent them back to the Health Ministry to be finalized.

“Recently, the Law Ministry sent the rules of amended tobacco control act back to the Health Ministry giving some suggestions and asked the concerned ministry to finalize it,” said M Amin Ul Ahsan, coordinator of the National Tobacco Control Cell under the Health Ministry. He said the final rules of the act will be sent to the Law Ministry soon for a gazette notification to be issued to implement the amended ‘Smoking and Tobacco Products Usage (Control) Act’ introduced in 2013.

The Health Ministry drafted the Smoking and Use of Tobacco Product (Control) Rules in November 2013 before sending it to the Law Ministry for vetting.

The Law Ministry suggested the concerned ministry take opinions from experts and the authorities concerned to incorporate pictorial warnings on cigarette packets before finalizing the rules. It also asked the Health Ministry to give a specific deadline to the tobacco companies to introduce pictorial warnings on harmful effects of tobacco products, official sources said.

The draft rules instruct the tobacco companies to incorporate pictorial warnings covering 50 percent of the area of the packaging of the tobacco products within nine months from the date of gazette notification of the rules.

But the Law Ministry has requested the Health Ministry to allow the tobacco companies 18 months for this, from the date of gazette notification.

Amin Ul Ahsan said the draft rules of the amended tobacco act will be finalized within next 20-25 days giving tobacco companies 12 months time to introduce pictorial warning on tobacco products.

“We hope, the amended tobacco control law would be enforced in a month,” he added.

The Law Ministry’s vetting to the draft rules has paved the way to implement the tobacco control act across the country.

Around 1.2 million people in Bangladesh are affected by eight types of tobacco related diseases, says WHO. About 57,000 people die in Bangladesh each year suffering from the tobacco related diseases.

Global Adult Tobacco Survey, 2009 shows that one percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is spent to purchase manufactured cigarettes. The cost of tobacco-related illnesses in Bangladesh attributable to tobacco usage was estimated at Tk 50.9 billion, including Tk 5.8 billion for illnesses resulting from secondhand smoke exposure in 2004.

It is estimated that on average a tobacco user spends about 4.5 percent of the monthly expenditure for tobacco consumption.

Bangladesh signed the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) in 2003 to cut tobacco use aiming to save the lives of its people from adverse impacts of deadly tobacco products.

As the country is bound to check the use of tobacco products to minimize health hazards, the government introduced the amended Smoking and Tobacco Products Usage (Control) Act in 2013 and the rules of the act are coming soon to make it enforceable.

“After the rules are framed, which will mainly describe the use of the pictorial warnings on the packets of the tobacco products, designated public areas and the role and duty of the

caretakers of the public places, the authorities concerned will be bound to abide by the law,” said Dr Syed Mahfuzul Huq, a World Health Organisation (WHO) official in Bangladesh.