



WORLD CANCER DAY 2010

## Cancer can be prevented too

PROF DR MOLLAH OBAYEDULLAH BAKI

Cancer is a leading cause of death around the world. Each year, over 12 million people receive a cancer diagnosis and 7.6 million die of the disease.

According to the Bangladesh Cancer Society, more than one million people have been suffering from cancer at present. In Bangladesh, each year, approximately 0.3 million people receive a cancer diagnosis and over 0.2 million die of the disease. The good news is that a major portion of cancers are potentially preventable.

World Cancer Day is part of the World Cancer Campaign, which responds to the Charter of Paris adopted at the World Summit for the New Millennium on February 4, 2000. It called for a strong alliance between researchers, health-care professionals, patients, governments, industry partners and the media to fight against cancer.



The Charter of Paris designated February 4 each year as World Cancer Day. The International Union against Cancer (UICC) initiated the World Cancer Campaign in 2005 in response to the Charter of Paris of 2000. The campaign emphasises that

43% of cancers can be prevented through the following healthy behaviors:

- Provide a smoke-free environment for children
- Be physically active, eat a balanced, healthy diet and avoid obesity
- Learn about vaccines for virus

-related liver and cervical cancers

• Avoid over-exposure to the sun  
World Cancer day is a global observance. This Day is marked to raise awareness about cancer and to encourage its prevention, detection and early treatment.

World Cancer Day 2010, led by

UICC members and with the support of the WHO will raise awareness of cancer prevention. World Cancer Day targets the public through global communications encouraging policy makers to make cancer a political priority to prevent cancer and raising quality of life for cancer patients are recurring themes.

This year's theme — "Cancer can be prevented too" focuses on simple measures to prevent cancer are as:

- No tobacco use
- A healthy diet and regular exercise
- Limited alcohol use
- Protection against cancer causing infections

This year's theme focuses on how the risk of developing cancer can significantly be reduced through simple measures.

The writer is the President of Bangladesh Cancer Society and Director, National Institute of Cancer Research & Hospital, Mohakhali, Dhaka.

## Noise pollution: Modern Plague of this decade

Transportation systems are the major source of noise pollution in this country. Besides, loud music, speech meetings created in the densely populated public places by human beings hit our ears and disturb the environment. Noise pollution is also created from aircraft and rail transport, air conditioners, factories and construction works. Especially residence adjacent to airports and factories experience noise pollution too much and its adverse effects too much.

These days' audio entertainment systems in the residential city parks are one of the most harmful and irritating factors specially for children and senior citizens. These above different types of noise pollution disturb our health and behaviour in a number of ways including deafness, lack of sleep, irritability, indigestion, heartburn, high blood pressure and heart disease. Just one noise explosion from a passing truck drastically alters endocrinal, neurological and cardiovascular functions in many individuals. If this is prolonged or frequent, the physiological disturbances become chronic and contribute to mental illness.

Noise pollution is measured in decibels. When noise is at 45 decibels, no human being can sleep, and at 120 decibels the ear is in pain and hearing begins to be damaged at 85 decibels. Increased noise levels give rise to a lack of concentration and accuracy at work which reduce one's productivity and performance. Difficult tasks can be impaired. Instruction or warning is difficult to follow which sometimes may lead to accidents.

Solving noise problems in current situation is not going to be an easy task. But, at least some noise problems can be prevented by discussing and finding a common solution. As a minimum, try to be a good neighbour by not annoying those who live your next door with your music during special social occasions.

## Get remedy from hyperpigmentation

DR RIFFAT H LUCY

The colour of human skin is determined by the pigment known as melanin, which can be yellow, brown, dark brown or black. Melanin is responsible for the colour of human skin. Levels of melanin in human body depend on heredity, race and amount of sunlight exposure. When the body produces too much melanin due to any cause it is termed as hyperpigmentation, which means darkening of skin. It may occur due to excessive sun bathing, hormone changes or drug reactions. Many a time wounds and scars leave a darker patch of skin. It is important to keep on the alert for any change in size, color or texture for indications of skin cancer. There is some variety of hyperpigmentation, as, birthmarks, moles, and aging spots are also indications of hyper pigmentation. Melasma, Lichen Simplex Chronicus, Birthmarks, Port-wine Stains, post-inflammatory hyper-pigmentation present as hyper-pigmentation.

**Melasma:** A dark mask appears over the cheeks, bridge of the nose and sometimes on chin and neck. The distribution is usually symmetrical. Melasma is mainly seen in women of child-bearing age which tends to occur during pregnancy and with use of oral contraceptives. The colour in melasma darkens during sunlight exposure. This condition usually disappears after the child birth or discontinuation of oral contraceptive.

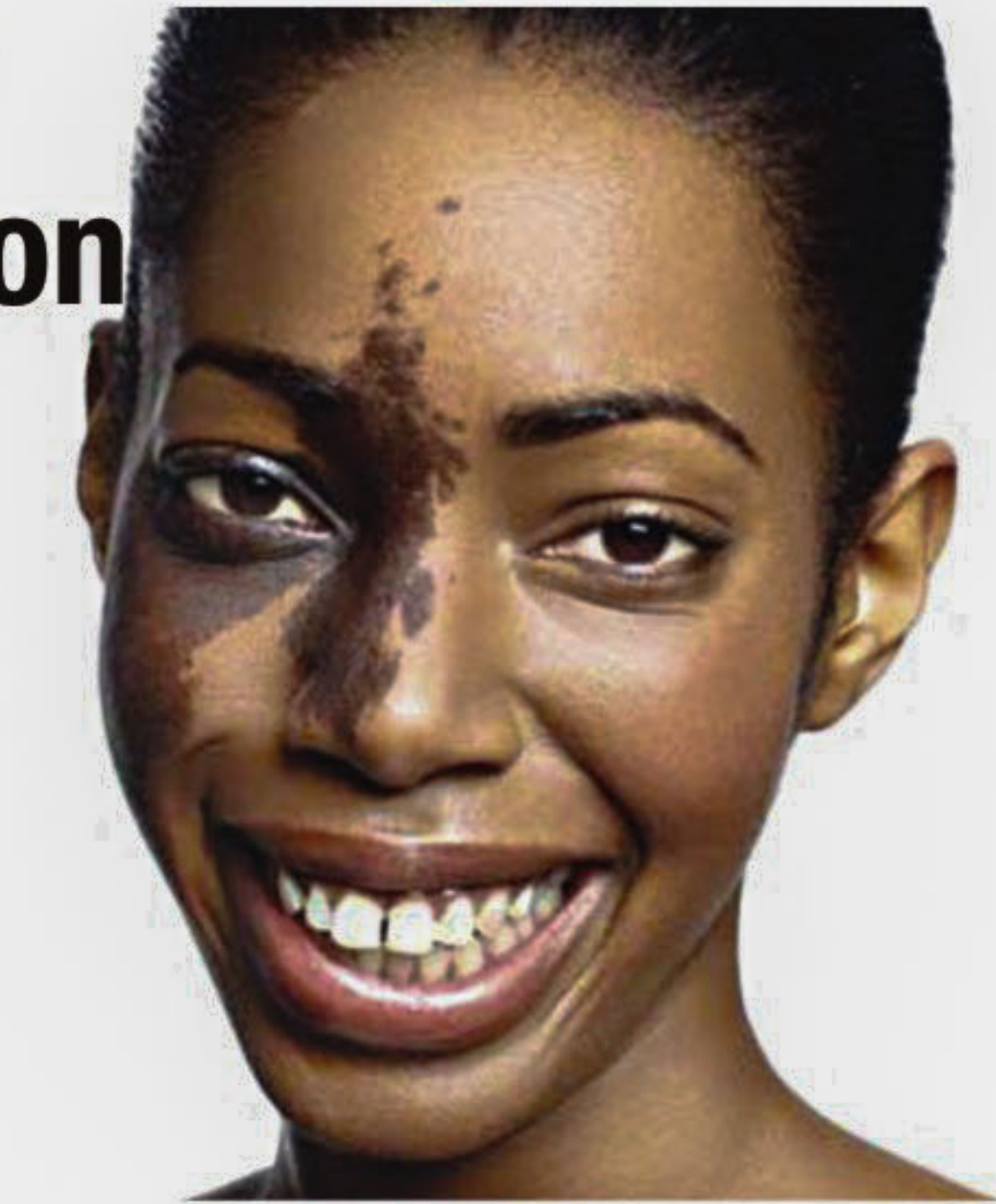
**Lichen Simplex Chronicus:** This skin pigmentation disorder is characterised by dark patches of skin accompanied with severe itching. This can lead to permanent scar and infection if untreated.

**Birthmarks:** This type of skin pigmentation appears at birth or in the few weeks following birth. These birthmarks do not generally pose any health risks and persist throughout.

**Port-wine stains:** These skin pigmentation spots are caused by abnormal development of capillaries and appear as a red or purple mark on the body.

**Post-inflammatory hyperpigmentation:** It is a discolouration that is left on the skin after an infection or an underlying skin disease which is healed.

A dermatologist will help in identifying the skin pigmentation condition with a visual examination and some simple tests. Most often skin pigmentation affects only the outward appearance and is not indicative of any underlying health risks. Sometimes a biopsy is done of the affected area to rule out any cancerous growth. The underlying skin disease may be trauma, skin infection, eczema, oral contraceptive pills or a drug reaction. One should avoid further trauma to the area or the cause, e.g. avoid frequent rubbing, discontinuation of oral contraceptives and keep



away from sunlight exposure etc.

Most often people affected by skin pigmentation need to use sunscreen and avoid excessive sun exposure. Use sunscreen regularly and avoid sun exposure as far as possible. This will minimise further darkening of the lesions.

Bleaching agents such as hydroquinone can be used to lighten the colour. Skin-lightening creams are available for hyperpigmentation. Hydroquinone is widely used to block formation of new melanin. Retin-A is also prescribed to counter the effects of hyperpigmentation. Local application of steroid creams for short time can help alleviate itching associated with some form of skin pigmentation. But no drug should be used without consulting a skin specialist, especially the steroids, as wrong treatment result in many adverse effects.

Aesthetic skin procedures like skin peels (glycolic acid peel, TCA peel) or dermabrasion may help in improving the effectiveness of the bleaching agents. Cosmetic camouflage can be used to hide the discoloured skin. Skillfully applied makeup can help in covering affected areas of the skin. Hypoallergenic cosmetics can be used to cover uneven and blotchy skin.

Sometimes treatment takes longer time and normal skin colour returns slowly. In dark-skinned persons, the colour tends to be more intense and persists for a longer period. Treatment requires patience of the patient. And always consult an expert for treatment and make-over. Keep your confidence high with clear skin.

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## Environmental toxins to thyroid gland and hormone

DR SHAHJADA SELIM

Over few decades, there has been growing concern about human and wildlife exposure to endocrine disruptors — commonly encountered chemicals that could disrupt endogenous hormone function. The thyroid gland (a hormonal gland in the neck; also called Adams apple in male) is largely affected by some of these environmental toxins. Over 100 naturally occurring and synthetic substances have been reported to have effects on thyroid function or thyroid hormone metabolism.

Environmentally mediated alterations in thyroid function are of particular concern for pregnant women and infants. Thyroid hormone is essential for development of baby in uterus and in infancy and childhood. Common substances that inhibit thyroidal iodine uptake include Perchlorate, thiocyanate, Poly-chlorinated biphenyls, Poly-brominated diphenylethers and nitrate etc. When present in sufficiently high concentrations, these substances decrease the active transport of iodine, an essential element to the thyroid gland and thereby decrease the hormone level.

**Perchlorate:** Perchlorate salts are used as oxidisers in solid propellants for rockets and missiles, fireworks, road flares, matches and air bag inflation systems. Perchlorate is also present in large concentrations in Chilean nitrate fertilisers. Low levels of perchlorate may also be found in the environment due to natural processes. Following the development of sensitive detection methods, perchlorate has been detected in the drinking water also. Since perchlorate is essentially not biodegradable, industrial contamination of water supplies is difficult and expensive to treat. The developing fetus is likely to be most vulnerable to the adverse effects of perchlorate exposure on thyroid function since thyroidal iodine turnover is highest in fetal life and the fetus requires adequate thyroid hormone for normal neurodevelopment. Iodine, required for infant nutrition, is secreted into breast milk and this process may be inhibited by perchlorate.

**Thiocyanate:** Cigarette smoke contains cyanide that is metabolised to Thiocyanate. It has been reported that women who smoke during pregnancy are more likely to give birth to neonates with decreased serum T4 levels (thyroid hormone), increased TSH (another

hormone) levels and thyroid enlargement. It has also been shown that diets high in thiocyanate contribute to the development of goitre in iodine-deficient regions. Similar to perchlorate, thiocyanate may decrease iodine secretion into breast milk.

**Nitrate:** Nitrates occur naturally in soil and groundwater due to the decomposition of organic materials and are present in plants. Sodium nitrite is also used as a preservative in cured meats and other foods. They are found in vegetables such as beets, celery, lettuce and spinach. In addition, inorganic nitrates are used as fertilisers. High nitrate ingestion may occur due to contamination of the water supply by human sewage or livestock manure, especially from feedlots or by runoff from farmland.

**Polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs):** It has been estimated that a total of about 1.5 million metric tons of PCBs were produced worldwide before bans were imposed. Although the levels have decreased, PCBs remain widespread in the environment and the food chain. Most human PCB exposure is through food sources.

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### INTERVIEW

## Increasing the talent pool is the key to expand the healthcare industry

STAR HEALTH REPORT

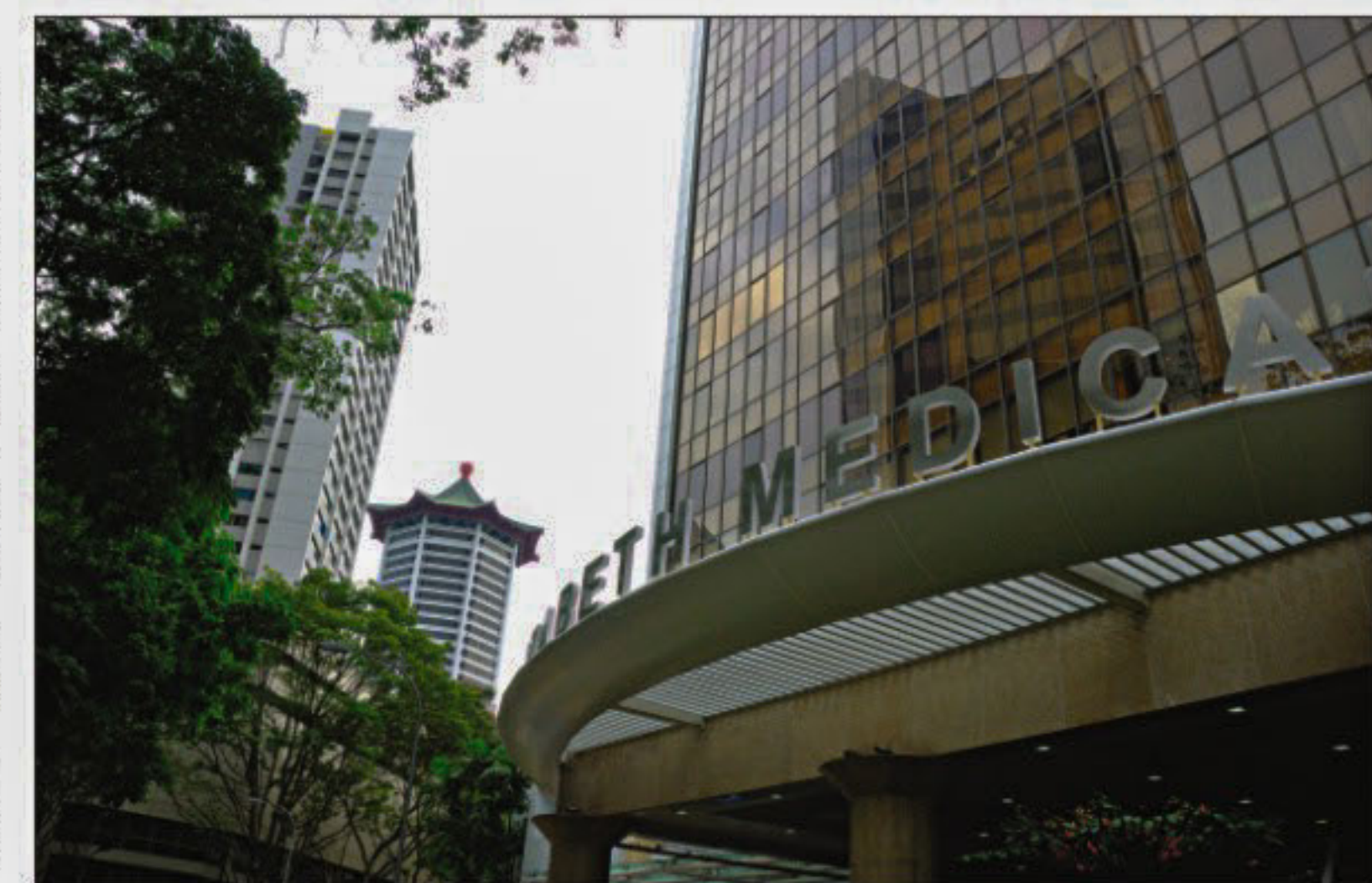
Singapore has established itself as a tertiary medical destination in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond. One of the Singapore's biggest private healthcare providers is Parkway Group Healthcare Pte Ltd, which operates three of premier healthcare providers: East Shore, Gleneagles and Mount Elizabeth Hospitals. Recently Mr. Kamaljeet Singh Gill, the Chief Marketing Officer of Parkway Health came to Bangladesh on a business trip and shared his views with Star Health.

**Star Health (SH):** What was the impact of global economic recession upon your healthcare business?

Mr Kamaljeet Singh Gill (Mr Gill): The effect of recession took some time to reach Singapore. Healthcare business was expected to be recession-proof. So we monitored the impact quarter to quarter basis upon many parameters like patient turnover and so on. It showed different patterns of ups and downs. Then we changed our marketing strategy to emphasis implying new policy — it was the time to invest more, rather pulling off the paddle from the business; we kept waiting to get the result of the investment in course of time. We emphasised to increase the service to the patients that ultimately helped us to recover the shortfall which was for the time being in fact. We believe that the healthcare is unlike the business of other commodities where the return comes promptly. It takes time to earn reputation form the patients who certify it for the sake of real services on the ground. So we intensified all our service oriented activities.

**SH:** Singapore has become the hub of medical services with the latest cutting edge technologies and procedures. What are the areas you broaden the horizon to attract more people?

Mr Gill: Parkway has promised to continuous updating the knowledge and technologies. All our hospitals are



Mount Elizabeth Hospital, Singapore

Joint Commission International (JCI) accredited. This basically tells that we are on the line of delivering standard services. We can handle patients better, faster in a safer environment. We train our doctors and nurses in such way that the patients do not have to wait when they come to us. We provide very specialised and personalised care.

We do not want to see Singapore as a medical tourism destination, but more a medical travel destination who provide the tertiary services (like bone marrow, liver, kidney, heart transplant etc.) when people actually need it; when people need the correct diagnosis and treatment accordingly.

**SH:** What are the other reasons you put on board to attract patients seeking medical services in terms of financial aspect?

Mr Gill: Well, we ensure the service at a shortest possible time which ultimately helps patients to spend less. We have so many fixed price packages that helps patients to make their budget at competitive price.

Cultural barriers are big problems in abroad. So we have interpreters for better and convenient communication with the hospital. We have liaison offices in countries from where patients come. Patients can consult with the doctors providing their investigation reports before travelling to Singapore that reduces the cost of staying more days in the hospital. Many procedures are done on day case basis now a days.

**SH:** What is your recommendation to expand the healthcare industry in a country like Bangladesh?

Mr Gill: Hospitals need to be built first and it can be built as many affluent Bangladeshis are there to do that. But more importantly — the talent pool of doctors, nurses and healthcare professionals need to be developed. Bangladesh is a very big market in terms of population. To satisfy the need of large number of patients, these talent pools are crucial where doctor-patient, doctor-nurse and patient-nurse ratio is very poor.

## Mitigating the alarming use of tobacco in Bangladesh

PROF DR AKM RAFIQUE UDDIN and DR MD SHAMIM HAYDER TALUKDER

Bangladesh faces serious tobacco epidemic. According to the recent Global Adult Tobacco Survey (GATS) 2009, 23 percent of adult (=15 years) currently smoke tobacco (Male 44.7 percent and Female 1.5 percent). The estimated number of current adult tobacco smokers is 21.9 million (Male 21.2 million and Female 0.7 million). The smoking rate in rural areas is slightly higher (23.6 percent) than in urban areas (21.3 percent). Half of the smokers use bidis, and the prevalence of bidi smoking in rural areas (13.5 percent) is higher than in urban areas (4.7 percent).

Among all adults, 45 percent were exposed to second hand smoking (SHS) in public places. Male (69.4 percent) are more exposed than female (20.8 percent). Restaurants (27.6 percent) and public transportation (26.3 percent) are the most common places people are exposed to SHS. Among all persons engaged in some occupation who work in indoor areas, 63 percent (11.5 million) were Exposed to SHS in indoor areas of the workplace, and among non-



smokers, 75.7 percent (5.1 million) were exposed to SHS at these workplaces.

It is estimated that in Bangladesh total expenditure on cigarettes is 1.0 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and on bidis is 0.4 percent of GDP. The price of 100 packs of manufactured cigarettes as a percentage of per capita GDP is 5 percent and the price of 100 packs of bidis as a percentage of per

capita GDP is 1 percent.

Fighting tobacco in Bangladesh will require a strong commitment to the World Health Organisation's MPOWER strategies. The six MPOWER strategies are:

- Monitor tobacco use and prevention policies
- Protect people from tobacco smoke
- Offer help to quit tobacco use
- Warn about the dangers of tobacco
- Enforce bans on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship
- Raise taxes on tobacco

Making MPOWER a reality in Bangladesh means effectively taxing bidis and raising taxes on cigarettes, enacting and enforcing strong smoke-free laws, and preventing and countering the advertising tactics of tobacco companies. These are proven strategies that can help avert unnecessary illness and death.

On the eve of Tobacco Awareness Month: 24-30 January, government, civil society should ramp up their efforts to curb tobacco use and raise voice to say NO to tobacco.

The Writers are respectively President and General Secretary of Non Communicable Diseases Forum (NCD-F) in Bangladesh.