



International Day of Action 2005

## **MALAYSIAN YOUTH JOIN GLOBAL FIGHT AGAINST MOVIES PUSHING TOBACCO**

**Tens of thousands in a dozen nations rally today to pressure major U.S. studios; International youth survey finds heavy tobacco influence from Hollywood exports.**

**Penang, February 23** — Malaysian tobacco control advocates are joining 20 countries worldwide in protesting against movies promoting tobacco to kids. The protest is aimed at media companies – in Hollywood, Bollywood and Hongkong in particular – that is promoting smoking scenes. The objective of the protest is to create awareness of the gravity of the situation as well as to slash tobacco deaths in today's teenage generation.

As part of the campaign, the Clearinghouse for Tobacco Control (C-Tob) is conducting a signature campaign from Feb 22-28 to submit a memorandum to the National Film Development Corporation Malaysia (FINAS) and the National Censorship Board persuading them to implement the blurring of cigarettes in movies such as that adopted in Thailand or otherwise flash a health warning at the bottom of the screen.

If the argument is that movies cannot do without smoking, then we have just to look across our border at Thailand.

In fact Thailand has banned smoking scenes on all local television channels since 2000. A white circle is used to blot out the act of smoking every time an actor takes a puff on a cigarette. It shows that it is not impossible to implement such legislation and there are important reasons why smoking has to be denormalised as an accepted social behavior.

The Vietnamese government has also banned most smoking scenes from local movies since 2003, except for parts that show soldiers sharing cigarettes in time of war.

Thailand with a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita of RM28,120 ranked 97<sup>th</sup> in the world; Vietnam, GDP per capita of RM9,500, ranking 160; as compared to Malaysia's GDP per capita of RM34,200, ranking the 84<sup>th</sup> place in 2003. Malaysia led by 13 places ahead in terms of GDP per capita of the Thais and 76 places that of Vietnam (2003). Yet the Thais and the Vietnamese were bold enough to implement such tobacco control legislations.

In fact, Thais' tobacco control legislations were the best in this region and among the best in the world. It realized that the cost of treating smoking-related diseases and nicotine addiction is bleeding it of what it can earn from the industry.

Rank	Country	GDP per capita (RM)
84	Malaysia	34,200
97	Thailand	28,120
160	Vietnam	9,500

Malaysia, being multiracial, has been the place where Malaysian movies, Hollywood, Bollywood and Hongkong movies are equally well received by fans. For example, the Malaysian movie industry had produced more than 600 movies since 1930s and cigarette smoking has been frequently seen in the movie scenes. As such, directors should take on a significant role in liberating its production from such scenes.

The reason is because the characterization of actors or actresses in movies has a profound impact on their fans. Smoking is one negative quality that has to be done away with. Moreover, the 37<sup>th</sup> National Fatwa Council Dialogue declared smoking as *haram* on 23 March 1995. Selangor and Kedah were the states that decided that smoking is *haram*, and it was last year that Penang was the third state to do so.

Many Muslim countries are now reconsidering the status of tobacco. Mufti of Egypt, Dr. Farid Wasil issued a *fatwa* (religious decree) in 1999 that declared smoking as *haram* (forbidden) in Islam. Brunei's State Mufti, Pehin Dato Ustaz Awang Haji Abdul Aziz, had also issued a *fatwa* against smoking in 2003.

Although we see movie stars smoking on and off scenes, there are many of them who died from smoking-related disease. The Hollywood list include Nat "King" Cole, Michael Landon, Betty Grable, Walt Disney, Yul Brynner and John Wayne. Many of the victims were sick for more than 10 years before succumbing to it. (Weblink to list of celebrities killed by smoking-related diseases:

<http://www.saclung.org/thumbs/TUTDcelebs&smoking.htm>)

It is a fallacy to think that smoking is part of a good movie because there are many movies that went without smoking scenes: Lake Placid, Lara Croft Tomb Raider: the Cradle of Life, Lethal Weapon 4, Meet the Fockers, Racing Stripes, National Treasure, Elektra, and many more. This demonstrates that a good movie needs a good script and directing. (A more comprehensive list of smoke-free movies can be found at: <http://pages.videotron.com/abc/films-movies/list.html>).

An informal survey of 800 youth 13-18 in Asia, Africa, South America and Europe found U.S. titles like *Titanic*, *X-Men*, *Armageddon*, and *The Fast and the Furious* on their list of Top Ten films. But anti-tobacco educators note that eight of these Top Ten showed smoking — including 100% of the movies rated PG-13 in the U.S. Of the ten most popular U.S. movie stars named by the young people, all have smoked on screen, half of them frequently.

“Teens everywhere like Hollywood movies,” says Ken Dahlgren of New York, who supervised the survey for the Smokefree Movies Action Network. “But if they have the same effect on adolescents in other countries that they do here, major U.S. studios are delivering hundreds of million of kids to the tobacco industry and piling up tens of millions of deaths.”

The world’s largest tobacco company, U.S.-based Philip Morris, makes more than half its sales outside the U.S. British American Tobacco, the world’s second largest, merged with Rothmans five years ago with the expressed intention of exploiting emerging markets. The three most prolific U.S. film studios — Columbia (Sony), Warner Bros. (Time Warner) and Disney — also lead in non-U.S. grosses. In 2004, Hollywood won 54% of its box office outside North America.

The share of U.S.-made movies with smoking, 80 percent, matches the profile of films rated in the Top Ten by the teens surveyed worldwide. Health groups say that giving movies with tobacco use the equivalent of a U.S. “R” rating (“no admission for those under 17 without an accompanying parent”) would cut youth exposure in half.

“It’s not right to exploit kids who love U.S. movies but don’t know the history of paid tobacco product placement in U.S. movies,” said Prof Rahmat Awang, director of the National Poison Centre and coordinator for C-Tob.

At 2.4 billion, the population of kids and teens alive today is the largest in history. Unless trends change, warn health experts, global tobacco deaths will total 450 million by 2050.

“Hollywood holds lavish benefits for rare diseases and that’s very praiseworthy,” says Rahmat. “But six bosses at six U.S. studios have so far refused to save tens of millions of lives around the world simply by picking up the phone and telling their producers to keep smoking out of future youth-rated movies. Ask yourself why.”

Another source of influence is Bollywood movies which has been around for more than 50 years and was said to have a following of 13 million Malaysians fans of all races. According to a World Health Organization survey in 2003, three out of four films produced by India's film industry over the past decade show their stars smoking. It was also revealed that if young people see one of their idols light up on screen they are 16 times more likely to think positively about smoking.

Bollywood actor Aamir Khan disclosed in an e-magazine interview last year that he was received several offers to advertise cigarette, tobacco, gutka (a sweet, flavorful tobacco

product manufactured in India) and alcohol. He admitted that he is addicted to smoking despite efforts to quit and he does not want his fans to smoke.  
([http://www.redhotcurry.com/entertainment/bollywood/march\\_2004/aamir\\_khan\\_quit\\_smoking.htm](http://www.redhotcurry.com/entertainment/bollywood/march_2004/aamir_khan_quit_smoking.htm))

Hongkong movies also have a high percentage of scenes with smoking scenes. One such recent example is the portrayal of Hongkong's martial arts queen Yuen Qiu being a cigarette smoking landlady in Kung Fu Hustle. Although it was meant to be a comedy, the fact remains that smoking reduces stamina required in martial arts. The other actor was Chow Yun Fat who has been type cast by his fans as a gun blazing, cigarette smoking hero.

Malaysia's movie industry can also take the initiative to impart good values to society by going smoke-free. There is a reason why actors smoke on screen. In marketing terms it is known as product placement whereby companies paid studios to have their products used in a particular movie. (Information on How Product Placement Works:  
<http://money.howstuffworks.com/product-placement.htm/printable>)

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For more information about the Smoke Free Movies Campaign and the International Day of Action: <http://smokefreemovies.ucsf.edu/international>

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