

Govt looks to ban e-cigarettes to prevent catastrophe

WHO says long-term impact is not clear but e-cigarettes can increase risks of heart disease and lung disorders

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The Cabinet is likely to approve the Smoking and Using of Tobacco Products (Control) (Amendment) Act, 2013 this month, which proposes a complete ban on the manufacturing, import and sale of e-cigarettes, with a provision of imprisonment of a maximum of six months, a fine or both.

Later, it will be placed in Parliament for passage into law.

The prime minister has already instructed the Health Ministry to amend the law, to make it more in line with the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control and compatible with the vision of building a tobacco-free country by 2040.

Regarding the current status of the legal amendment process, Hossain Ali Khondakar, coordinator of the National Tobacco Control Cell (NTCC) under the Health Ministry, said that the amendment proposal is expected to be brought up in the Cabinet this month.

“The ministry believes that e-cigarettes and vaping are as harmful to health as cigarettes,” he added.

The use of e-cigarettes is increasing alarmingly in the country and posing a major threat to public health—mainly teenagers and youths, health experts warn.

They suggest that smoking e-cigarettes or vaping is just as harmful to health as cigarettes, and therefore, it should be banned through a speedy revision of the law.

To safeguard public health, a total of 32 countries including India, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Singapore have already banned e-cigarettes.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), there are many different types of e-cigarettes in use, also known as electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS) and sometimes electronic non-nicotine delivery systems (ENNDS).

These systems heat a liquid to create aerosols that are inhaled by the user. These so-called e-liquids may or may not contain nicotine (but not tobacco) but also typically contain additives, flavours and chemicals that can be toxic to people’s health.

Bangladesh Medical Association (BMA) Secretary General Dr Ehteshamul Haque



Chowdhury Dulal said that e-cigarettes are the same as normal cigarettes. Cigarette companies are trying to market it differently.

The BMA and the National Heart Foundation have requested the prime minister and the health minister to impose a ban on e-cigarettes in Bangladesh, he said.

He said they will conduct campaigns in various media to make people aware of this.

Dr Debashish Patwary, associate professor of the Sylhet North East Cancer Hospital, said the three main harmful components of cigarettes—carbon, nicotine, and lead—are pushing the society toward dire diseases like cancer.

As a result, people are using vapes as an alternative to cigarettes. But, vaping cannot be good for the body in any part. The vape instrument is divided into three parts - firstly the battery (which needs to be charged), secondly the atomizer, and the last part is the cartridge. These cartridges contain nicotine.

“Nicotine is a flavoured liquid and highly purified. As a result, we can easily inhale it and become addicted to it. It contains propenyl glycol and formaldehyde which has been linked to cancer and propenyl glycol to asthma. Nowadays, it has become a fashion for many to vape,” Dr Debashish said.

Rationality of opposition

On the other hand, different groups are campaigning against the move to amend the law. One of them is Voice of Vapers (VoV)

Bangladesh, a vape advocacy group, which protested the amendment, asking the government to reconsider the proposed amendments and “avoid public health disaster that will be caused by the prohibitionist approach”.

The World Vapers Alliance (WVA) joined VoV Bangladesh in opposing the proposed amendments.

“It’s ironic that the health authorities in Bangladesh are not taking into account the failure of the vaping ban in its neighbouring country - India. Rather opposite - they endorse a similar prohibitionist approach, which is already predisposed to fail, cause the emergence of illicit trade and jeopardise millions of lives by pushing Vapers back to smoking,” said Liza Katsiashvili, WVA’s community manager.

“The only realistic and pragmatic solution to achieving a smoke-free goal in Bangladesh and globally is through smoking cessation and mainly vaping, which has proven to be 95% less harmful than conventional cigarettes and twice as effective for quitting than other harm reduction methods for smokers,” she claimed.

Recently, the VoV Bangladesh and Asia Harm Reduction Alliance (AHRA) organized a summit, in cooperation with the grantees and representatives of the Foundation for a Smoke-free World (FSFW), a Philip Morris International (PMI) sponsored front group. They also distorted the anti-vaping stance of some international entities, including the WHO, in a special supplement.

According to the WHO, evidence reveals that these products are harmful to health and are not safe.

“However, it is too early to provide a clear answer on the long-term impact of using them or being exposed to them. Some recent studies suggest that ENDS use can increase the risk of heart disease and lung disorders. Nicotine exposure in pregnant women can have similar consequences for the brain development of the fetus,” the WHO said, adding that vaping can also expose non-smokers and bystanders to nicotine and other harmful chemicals.

The e-cigarettes have also been linked to physical injuries, including burns from explosions or malfunctions, when the products are not of the expected standard or are tampered with by users, it said. ●