



Asia’s leaders reject PMI’s sponsorship of Nikkei Conference



Nikkei Inc’s 26th International Conference on the [Future of Asia](#) proceeded on 20-21 May, [minus the sponsorship](#) of Philip Morris International (PMI). SEATCA joined renowned international organizations in an [open letter](#) calling on the organizers to end PMI’s sponsorship. The organizers also heard directly from other concerned groups and leaders. Following the decision from several leaders to withdraw from the conference because of the tobacco sponsorship and international advocacy, just days before the conference, on 17 May, PMI pulled out its sponsorship. The session in which PMI’s CEO, Jacek Olczak, was scheduled to speak was also cancelled.



Myanmar: New video on tobacco industry interference released

People’s Health Foundation [PHF] – TIM member in Myanmar, released a short [video](#) on TI interference.

The video explains smoking is not just about health but also about the tobacco industry’s activities in making people smoke its interference in tobacco control. Tobacco industry uses advertising and promotion to attract young people to buy cigarettes. Although the government has prohibited tobacco advertisements and promotions, the advertising is done through TI-CSR activities such as in rural development and promotions at tea shops. E-cigarettes (ENDS) and heated tobacco products (HTPs) are also harmful to health. The video is available on Facebook and PHF [website](#).

WHAT IS THE TOBACCO/VAPING INDUSTRY UP TO IN THE REGION

1. Tobacco industry expects to sell more cigarettes in ASEAN

- According to the 2020 GlobalData report on tobacco, cigarette consumption is forecasted to increase or continue to remain high in the ASEAN region. This forecast shows although the tobacco industry is aggressively promoting new electronic smoking devices, (ENDS, ENNDS, HTPs), it does not intend to stop selling conventional cigarettes.
- The TIM team in Lao PDR exposed Lao Tobacco Company's launch of a new promotion of waterproof bags given to customers purchasing cigarettes during the traditional New Year's Day. This is a violation of the tobacco control law.
- A new GlobalData report shows ESDs attract new consumers. These products include Bidi Stick disposal vape pens, nicotine pouch and other such products.

2. Tobacco industry tactics to increase their public image as good corporation:

- To distract attention away from the harmfulness of the tobacco industry, transnational tobacco companies routinely receive *The Top Employer* Institute award. While this Institute also awards many other corporations, the award is important to tobacco companies because they can advertise this award in the media to boost their public corporate image. This continue to happen across the region.
- The media is engaged to attack tobacco control efforts. A *Philippines Inquirer* article, [Lawmakers hit DOH for not distributing donated respirators to hospitals](#), throws an accusatory light on the Philippines Department of Health for rejecting respirators donated by the tobacco industry. While the DOH was following its rules, however this article attacks the Civil Service Commission-Department of Health's Joint Memorandum Circular (JMC) that limits the interaction of the bureaucracy with the tobacco industry to only when strictly necessary. This news article boosts the image of the tobacco industry for donating equipment, while damaging public reputation of the very agency protecting public health.
- *INKOMPASS* - PMI's way to promote itself. PMI's *INKOMPASS* uses career opportunity as a way to target and recruit young people. The promotional [video](#) clearly states *INKOMPASS*, established in Thailand in 2014, is to build the reputation of PMI. With the support of PMI, *INKOMPASS* launches paid internship programs in [more than 30 countries](#) worldwide. Besides Thailand, this program is promoted in Indonesia, Philippines, Malaysia, and Vietnam which are also key markets for PMI.

3. ENDS/HTP front groups more vocal in Asia: Vaping groups in Asia stepped-up their noise level to drown-out the important QUIT message during World No Tobacco Day. Vaping proponents from several Asian countries including Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and Pakistan are members of CAPHRA, an alliance which is a member of the International Network of Nicotine Consumer Organizations (INNCO). The INNCO is an international network promoting ENDS/HTPs and has received funds from the [Foundation for a Smoke-Free World](#), which in turn is funded by [Philip Morris International](#).

4. Philip Morris more than doubles its pandemic [CSR expenses](#) in ASEAN: Since most countries have banned direct tobacco advertising, PMI promoted its sponsorship programs through pandemic related CSR activities. Last year, PMI increased its CSR charity in the ASEAN region to about USD 22 million which is more than double it spent in 2019. In 2020, PMI generated about USD 28.69 billion in [net revenues](#). PMI's CSR expenses is just promotion expenses.

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