

**THE PROTEST AND THE LETTER OF COMPLAINT OF BURNING BRAIN
SOCIETY SENT TO THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA IN 2004 AFTER THE
GOVERNOR O. P. VERMA PARTICIPATED IN TOBACCO COMPANIES
FUNCTION WHICH PROMOTED THE BRAND OF THE CIGARETTE “RED &
WHITE”**

The e-mail sent to the President. This was followed by a hard copy letter.

Date:	Thu, 8 Jan 2004 01:34:33 -0800 (PST)
From:	"Hemant Goswami" <hemantgoswami@yahoo.com>
Subject:	Kind Attn: The President, His Excellency A. P. J. Abdul Kalam - Our Protest
To:	presidentofindia@rb.nic.in

Kind Attn: The President, His Excellency A. P. J. Abdul Kalam

Sir,

We must have a guideline on what a Governor should do and what he should not. We protest to the Governor of Punjab playing in the hands of Tobacco Company. WE FELT SORRY TO SEE THE GOVERNOR PROMOTING A BRAND OF CIGARETTE.

On January 7, 2004 at Hotel Mountview in Chandigarh, the Governor of Punjab, Justice (Retd.) O. P. Verma presided as the Chief Guest at a ceremony of a Tobacco cigarette company “Godfrey Phillips India Ltd.” The GOC-in-Chief Lt. Gen. S. S. Mehta & the Chief Secretary, Govt of Haryana, A. N. Mathur were the Guests of Honour. The occasion was presentation of “Bravery Awards,” which have been instituted in the name of one of the brand of cigarettes “Red & White”.

Any layman can understand that institution of such an award is a marketing gimmick solely for the purpose of promoting the brand in the targeted segment. The intention for instituting the award in the name of a brand of cigarette is to promote it as stuff for the youngsters who have a desire to appear strong & brave. With the punch line as “Red & White smokers are a class apart (in Hindi “*Red & White piney walon ki baat hi kuch aur hai*”) and promoted by young star models leaves no doubt about the intention & objectives to institute the awards and the efforts to promote it for the young segment. Since 85% of the smokers start smoking before the age of 18 so encashing on the hidden desires of every youngster to appear macho & strong is a natural but sly effort.

If someone still misses the point, then do consider that;

- The award has been instituted by a cigarette company
- It has been named after one of its cigarette. (It could have been named (*anyname*) Bravery Award like the “Neerja Banot Award” or it could even be called anything else. By naming it as Red & White leaves no scope for imagination.
- The name is written in the same font, colour, design and style as the cigarette logo and pack. The punch line of the award even says “The colours of Courage.” (If anybody else would be doing so any court of law will hold it as infringement of the trademark.)
- It is promoted by advertisements which are nothing but surrogate advertisements to promote the brand. The publicity generated is worth millions of rupees, i.e. to generate equal amount of visibility the company had to spend much more money.
- It is wholly funded by the cigarette company and its marketing division and promoted under the guise of a social initiative by the company.

In the directive principals of the state policy, as listed in the “Part IV” of the “Constitution of India,” it is the duty of the state to improve the public health and take care that the health of the people is not abused. Besides the “Social Welfare Ministry” and the “Ministry of Health & Family Welfare” spends millions of rupees on spreading awareness about the ill effects of consuming tobacco. Recently even the Supreme Court passed orders with the same spirit of limiting the influence of tobacco on the public.

But what an irony, here is the Governor of the state, becoming a part of a function bearing the name of a cigarette, instituted by a cigarette company bearing an exact resemblance of the cigarette pack and funded solely by the marketing funds meant for brand promotion.

I am sure the Honourable Governor is prudent enough to be aware about the direct result & consequence of his presence in such a function. He very well understands that his presence in any function provides it an added grace and stature resulting in greater publicity and media coverage. His Excellency can not be oblivious of the fact that the presence of the Governor of the state accords such functions official status and accent. The inevitable result of such acts is brand promotion and brand awareness of the cigarette brand. Besides, the effect of such glorification of a cigarette brand on the impressionable minds of the young children can be well judged.

Being a retired Judge of the highest court of this country leaves no doubt that His Excellency, the Governor is fully aware of the “Directive Principles,” the laws and the spirit of the Constitution. At the same time being the head of a government means that the policies and effort of the government for spreading awareness about such social ills are within the active knowledge of His Excellency.

Then how and why is he and the other senior officials of the government are directly or indirectly involved in promoting a brand of cigarette is beyond the scope of any socially aware person’s comprehension. Can somebody please explain?

We at “Burning Brain Society” are working on our own initiative to fight this social problem, we are working real hard for spreading awareness about the ills of tobacco with the limited resources we have. It has been hard to generate every single rupee for the issue, but still somehow we have managed to contribute our bit.

Under such a scenario it hurts and pains when we find the State itself contributing in promoting the brand of cigarette under the guise of some surrogate activity and dignitaries like the Governor, GOC-in-Chief & the Chief Secretary of Haryana endorsing the brand promotion activities. Had the award been presented by some star of sportsperson things would have been different.

We ask the Governor and the government, is the Governor not aware that in the next 20 years tobacco is going to be the cause of 100 million deaths per year? Is he not aware that each cigarette reduces the life span of a person by 20 minutes? Is he not aware that each cigarette contains over 4000 toxic compounds? Is he not aware how it kills the potential of young people? Is it really a social initiative of the cigarette company?

The Governor O. P. Verma was confronted at the venue itself by the undersigned & the members of the Burning Brain Society. Immediately on entering Hotel Mountview, the undersigned told the Governor, “We protest to your presence in a function which will promote a brand of cigarette.” The Governor was reminded that his presence shall lead to direct promotion of the “Red & White” cigarette brand. He was also told that in the next 20 years over 100 million people shall die every year because of smoking. But, the Governor remarked that “You have a right to express yourself” and preferred to be a part of the “Red & White” cigarette function.

We strongly protest. We request your good office to take corrective action so that such a thing never happens in future.

Hemant Goswami
Chairperson,

Burning Brain Society, Glass office, Hotel Shivalikview, Sector 17, Chandigarh 160 017