

Regulation of flavoured smokeless tobacco in the South-East Asia Region

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Smokeless tobacco

- **Trends of flavoured tobacco products in the South-East Asia Region**
- **Regulatory environment for control of flavoured smokeless tobacco in the South-East Asia Region**

Abbreviations

DHS	Demographic and Health Surveys
GATS	Global Adult Tobacco Survey
GTSS	Global Tobacco Surveillance System
GYTS	Global Youth Tobacco Survey
ITC	International Tobacco Control
NCD	Noncommunicable Disease
NFHS	National Family Health Surveys
SLT	Smokeless Tobacco
STEPS	STEPwise approach to surveillance
WHO	World Health Organization

- Flavoured smokeless tobacco is ill defined
- Flavoured smokeless tobacco constitutes 70–98% of all SLT products in the South-East Asia Region
- Adult use of flavoured smokeless tobacco: 3–27%
- Youth use of flavoured smokeless tobacco: 7–10%

Background

Chewing forms of smokeless tobacco (SLT) and related products are highly prevalent in many countries including Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Myanmar and are increasingly becoming popular in some other countries in the South-East Asia Region, e.g. Nepal, Sri Lanka and Maldives. Betel nut (favoured and unflavoured), both manufactured and prepared for personal consumption by users, is a common constituent of SLT products. Such products, which are basically meant for chewing, can primarily be categorized into one of the following:

- (i) areca nut alone;
- (ii) chewing tobacco;
- (iii) betel quid without tobacco; and
- (iv) betel quid with tobacco (1,2).

The second and fourth types constitute SLT along with sucking, dentrifice and nasal tobacco products (3). These products have inter- and intra-country variations in ingredients and nomenclature, indicating limited knowledge about exact terminology and content of the SLT (4). All these SLT products are Group 1 carcinogens and are manufactured/used along with a variety of additives, including flavouring agents (1–7). Flavours can be characterized by physical means (smell/taste) or by chemical means (presence of specific chemical molecules) (8). Additives are any ingredients other than tobacco in a given tobacco product. Therefore, all flavouring agents are additives.

The list of SLT products (*Annexure 1*) assessed in various surveys in the South-East Asia Region reveals that most of the SLT products have additives and/or flavours. These

additives are meant for improving the attractiveness of the tobacco product (leading to initiation) and increasing the dependence on its use (leading to continued use) (9–11). This lures the youth and increases demand for tobacco products, hence flavoured tobacco products are considered as “starter” products (9,10). The numerous flavour descriptions can be categorized into eight major groups – fruit, spice, herb, alcohol, menthol, sweet, floral and miscellaneous (8). Addition of these flavours adulterates the tobacco products. The various functions of these flavours in SLT are to appeal to the youth, attract new users, appeal to cigarette smokers and experienced users, appeal to the masculinity of men, mask the tobacco taste/”bite”, create an anaesthetic effect/reduce pain, modify nicotine delivery/affect pH, influence bacterial content, stimulate the nervous system/increase perception of impact, create perception of novelty or innovation and extend product lines (12).

The list of flavoured SLT used in the South-East Asia Region is given in Table 1.

Table 1. List of flavoured SLT used in the South-East Asia Region

Country	Flavoured SLT (4,6,8,13–16)
Bangladesh	<i>Zarda, paan masala, gutkha, gul</i> . Betel leaf itself adds flavour to SLT
Bhutan	Snuff, betel quid with tobacco
India	Betel quid with tobacco, <i>gutkha, paan masala, gul, gudakau, snuff, bazaar, kiwam</i> , dentrifice with tobacco
Indonesia	Snuff, betel quid with tobacco
Myanmar	Betel quid with tobacco (all forms)
Nepal	<i>Gutkha, paan</i> with tobacco (betel quid with tobacco), <i>zarda, paan masala</i>
Sri Lanka	Betel quid with tobacco, <i>paan parag/paan masala</i> , red tooth powder, tobacco powder, <i>zarda</i>
Thailand	Snuff, betel quid with tobacco

Flavoured tobacco products are preferred over non-flavoured ones by novices and young users (10). In USA, 51% of SLT users consume flavoured non-cigarette tobacco (17). Other

studies from USA suggest that flavoured SLT users constitute three fifths of the total current SLT users (18). The first and second choices for SLT tobacco are mint or wintergreen flavoured tobacco. Flavoured tobacco use is higher among women than men(19).

A deliberate strategy to push for flavoured tobacco products has been successfully pursued by tobacco industries (9,12). The common flavouring agents like cloves (21), camphor (22–25), coumarin, diphenyl ether (27), menthol (28–31), furan derivatives (20), etc. have ill-effects on our health (Table 2). Some of the agents are also possible human carcinogens.

Table 2: Health hazards of flavouring agents

Flavouring agent	Health hazards
Furan derivatives (20)	Group 2B carcinogen (possibly carcinogenic to humans)
Eugenol (cloves) (21)	Respiratory infection, aspiration pneumonitis, haemoptysis and haemorrhagic pulmonary oedema
Camphor (22–25)	Disorientation, muscle spasms, abdominal cramps, lethargy, irritability, vomiting, seizures and convulsions (a large dose is required)
Coumarin (26)	Liver toxicity in laboratory animals following oral administration
Diphenyl ether (27)	Severe, irreversible degenerative lesions on the liver and kidneys of humans (a large dose is required)
Menthol (28–31)	Vertigo or ataxia; nicotine delivery enhancer and reinforcer of smoking behaviour

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