

Headline	Gov't launches new ad campaign vs smoking	
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Gov't launches new ad campaign vs smoking

The government, through the Department of Finance (DOF) and the Department of Health (DOH), has unleashed a one-two punch against smoking, and the National Fist is leading the charge.

The DOF launched on its social media account on Wednesday night a new 29-second video of Sen. Manny Pacquiao sparring with and knocking out the 1990s cigarette mascot “Yosi Kadiri” in a boxing ring.

The video is part of the government’s ad campaign to raise cigarette excise taxes and to demolish a formidable opponent—fake cigarettes and counterfeit internal revenue stamps that allows crooked traders to evade tax payments.

The Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) has also stepped up its game and filed charges on Thursday against Tacloban City businessman Paul Cartel Radam for P212.6 million in unpaid excise taxes.

In a statement, the BIR said it filed a criminal complaint at the Department of Justice against Radam based on the discovery by the National Bureau of Investigation-Eastern Visayas of counterfeit cigarettes and packs with fake stamps affixed to them in a warehouse owned by Radam.

“Upon inspection and systematic verification of 19 randomly selected master cases, using a Taggant reader, [a BIR-registered tool used to test the authenticity of excise stamps affixed on cigarette packs], it was discovered that all selected cigarette packs bear fake stamps and carry the same serial number,” the BIR said.

“A total of 1,215 master cases containing various cigarettes with fake stamps were marked and seized from the respondent,” it said.

At least P60 a pack

Showing off his tiptop boxing form, Pacquiao declared the fight was not yet over before disposing of Yosi Kadiri with three punches—one each to avenge the youth afflicted with a smoking vice, the sick who suffer from diseases caused by smoking, and families who lost their loved ones to smoking-related deaths.

“Hindi pa tapos ang laban,” he said, adding that the Filipino youth could be protected from smoking through the increase in excise taxes on cigarettes to at least P60 per pack.

Under the Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion Act, the unitary cigarette excise tax had already been raised to P35 a pack since July 2018.

The House of Representatives also approved last year on third and final reading higher excise taxes on tobacco products, but only to P37.50 a pack starting July this year, and then to P40 in July 2020, P42.50 in July 2021, P45 in July 2022, and 4 percent annually starting July 2023.

In the Senate, there are three pending bills aimed at jacking up the excise tax on cigarettes to between P60 and P90 a pack. One bill was sponsored by Pacquiao himself.

“With only three working weeks left for the 17th Congress, the ad launch is part of a multistakeholder push to increase tobacco excise taxes to at least P60 per pack to safeguard public health and sustain funding for the Universal Health Care (UHC) Law,” the DOF said in a statement.

Iconic mascot

The DOF noted that Yosi Kadiri was “one of the most successful health campaigns in the 1990s” and was first launched by the DOH under then Health Secretary Juan Flavio Velasco, who later became a senator.

According to the DOF, increased tobacco excise taxes would help stop smoking among Filipinos, especially the young, and “help sustainably fund the expanded UHC Law.”

The DOF and the DOH are also pushing to raise the rates slapped on alcohol products under a proposed tax reform package, “2 plus.”

Funding gap

“Raising excise taxes on ‘sin’ products is still the most effective policy tool to affect alcohol and tobacco prices to discourage consumption and prevent especially the youth and the poor from smoking and binge drinking,” the DOF said.