

Tobacco industry securing connections with political elites: a case study from Sri Lanka

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Background:

Ceylon Tobacco Company PLC (CTC), a British American Tobacco subsidiary, holds a de facto monopoly of the Sri Lankan cigarette market with a 99% market share. A CTC internal document dated 1985 justified recruitment of an ex-army official to its Board of Directors (Board) citing that he had “close relationships with officials who now hold senior positions in the Government”. This study aimed to explore the political and professional connections of Sri Lankans who served on the CTC Board from 2000 onwards and their transparency in reporting them.

Methods: CTC Annual reports were used to identify all locals who served on the Board. Media articles, interviews and personal profiles published in public domains were identified via the Google search engine and manually in print literature. Identified data were analysed using content analysis to explore other professional (positions held in other corporates/organisations), political (links with political parties and politicians) and family networks (famous/powerful relatives) and transparency of reporting their affiliations to CTC.

Results: During the period, 12 Sri Lankans served on the CTC Board, 10 were men. Four of these served as Chair, all men. Board composition of five Sri Lankans to zero expatriates in 2000, gradually shifted to two to two in 2016. All held high rank positions either in government institutions, other private corporations or professional associations related to commerce and management. Five simultaneously held high-rank positions in government agencies in appointments made by the President or a Minister. Two came from famous families. The only two females served in the board were ‘tax experts’. Except for CTC Annual Reports, personal profiles and media articles reporting events directly related to CTC, their affiliation to CTC was rarely mentioned. Conclusions: The local tobacco directors were well linked socially and politically. Their affiliation to CTC was not satisfactorily disclosed in public media. Tob. Induc.

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