

EDITOR'S MEMO

WINTER BONUS 2003



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IMAGE BUILDING

They said that, this time, I had *really* lost my mind. Just when my friends and family thought they had finally grown accustomed to the quirks one develops from editing the world's leading tobacco trade journal—only a tobacco reporter would bore his acquaintances with the trivia of porous plug wrap production on a Saturday night—I stunned them again, by announcing an editorial trip to Pakistan's Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP), a tobacco-growing area straddling the unruly border with Afghanistan.

Listening to their farewell lectures on the way to the airport, you'd think I was heading for my own funeral. Among other unappealing scenarios, my friends predicted I'd be kidnapped by Pathan tribesmen, threatened by remnants of Afghanistan's former Taliban regime, and spend the rest of my days huddling in caves in the custody of holy warriors with portable rocket launchers—if the local drug barons didn't get hold of me first.

I forgave them for their ignorance. Their fears, while unfounded, were understandable. International press coverage of Pakistan has been mostly negative in recent years. First there was a military coup, then tit-for-tat nuclear tests with India. And following the Sept. 11 attacks in the United States, a disproportionate number of terror suspects seem to have been apprehended in Pakistan.

But, while Pakistan undeniably has its share of troubles, the country also boasts a success story—one that hasn't been picked up by the mainstream media, or any of the trade publications for that

matter. Many international buyers still view Pakistani tobacco as an undesirable leaf, of low quality and with poor smoking qualities, but that image is hopelessly outdated. Following significant investments in yields and quality, Pakistani fillers today can hold their own against anything on the world market.

Unfortunately, few people are aware of this development. Tobacco, of course, is not a commodity that can be bought over the Internet; it must be felt, smelled and smoked by professionals on the ground. The political situation, however, continues to deter many buyers from visiting Pakistan, preventing them from learning about the remarkable developments there.

I traveled to Pakistan to find out about the Pakistani tobacco industry firsthand. As it turns out, tobacco representatives need not be afraid, especially if they are hosted by one of the local tobacco companies. Even in the conservative NWFP, currently ruled by hard-line Islamic clerics, our magazine was received with open arms. The only uncomfortable moment arose when farmers started arguing about who would have the privilege of serving tea and cookies to their foreign guest.

Please turn to page 6 to read about Pakistan's extraordinary turnaround. I am confident that my report will help persuade the international tobacco community to take another look at Pakistani tobaccos, and make foreign buyers less reluctant to travel to this fascinating country. Convincing my friends of my sanity will prove a much greater challenge, I am afraid—they think I am as crazy as ever.

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