

AKHBAR : BERITA HARIAN
MUKA SURAT : 20
RUANGAN : NASIONAL

20

Nasional

Jumaat, 4 Oktober 2024 **BH**

Kitaran lengkap Akta 852 mampu kurangkan jumlah perokok

Semua produk merokok kini ada undang-undang khas untuk dikawal selia

Oleh Ilah Hafiz Aziz
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Kuala Lumpur: Kitaran undang-undang lengkap Akta Kawalan Produk Merokok Demi Kesehatan Awam 2024 (Akta 852) dijangka mampu mengurangkan jumlah perokok menjelang 2045.

Pengerusi Majlis Penasihat Pertubuhan Amal Perubatan Ibnu

Sina Malaysia (PAPISMA), Dr Suhazeli Abdullah, berkata kitaran itu bermula daripada pembentangan menteri dan disudahi dengan penguatkuasaan akta itu pada kelmarin.

Katanya, melalui kewujudan Akta 852, semua produk merokok sama ada rokok konvensional atau rokok elektronik dan seumpamanya sudah mempunyai akta khas untuk dikawal selia, berbanding kebergantungan terhadap Peraturan-Peraturan Kawalan Hasil Tembakau 2004 (PPKHT 2004) yang termaktub dalam Akta Makanan 1983 yang terhad.

13 perundangan terperinci

Katanya, dalam akta itu juga terdapat 13 perundangan atau Pemberitahuan Undangan (PU) yang memperincikan undang-

undang berkenan.

"Terdapat sembilan PU (A) dan empat PU (B) yang jelas meningkatkan lagi produktiviti rakyat negara dan mengurangkan jumlah perokok menjelang 2045 seperti Perintah Tempat Dilarang Merokok, membabitkan 28 kawasan larangan merokok jelas termasuk lokasi baharu seperti bangunan dobi, tempat kerja

dan pendidikan tinggi serta dalam jarak 40 meter. "Perintah Amaran Larangan Merokok dengan larangan merokok/vape dikemas kini mengikut spesifikasi ditetapkan oleh akta dan mana-mana premis wajib menggunakan logo dan papan tanda seperti yang termaktub itu.



Suhazeli Abdullah

"PU (A) berkaitan Kawalan Penjualan paling jelas punca kuasa pelaksanaannya kerana kerajaan boleh mengadakan sekatan jualan lebih ketat termasuk Larangan Pameran (display ban). Ia juga memperincikan larangan penjualan secara dalam talian dan mesin layan diri, larangan penjualan di

dalam kawasan institusi pendidikan dan pendidikan tinggi serta dalam jarak 40 meter.

"Dalam PU (A) Pendaftaran Produk, setiap produk merokok yang ingin dijual wajib mendaftar di bawah Kementerian Kesihatan (KKM) dengan sekali pendaftaran sebanyak RM5,000,

yang dilihat munasabah," katanya kepada BH, di sini semalam.

Dr Suhazeli berkata, penguatkuasaan pada 1 Oktober lalu dilihat menjadi sejarah besar bagi mereka yang berjuang untuk memartabatkan kesihatan rakyat supaya rakyat tidak semakin rosak akibat rokok dan vape dalam negara.

KMM semalam meminta semua kementerian dan agensi berkaitan, badan profesional, badan bukan kerajaan (NGO), persatuan peniaga dan pengguna serta seluruh lapisan masyarakat memberikan sokongan serta kerjasama dalam menguatkuasakan Akta 852 ini.

"Bermula 1 Oktober, semua produk merokok perlu didaftarkan kepada KKM bagi mendapatkan kelulusan sebelum boleh diedarkan di pasaran," katanya.

AKHBAR : HARIAN METRO
MUKA SURAT : 17
RUANGAN : LOKAL

Vape serupa *marker pen!*

Gesa keluar garis panduan elak rokok elektronik menyerupai bentuk mengelirukan

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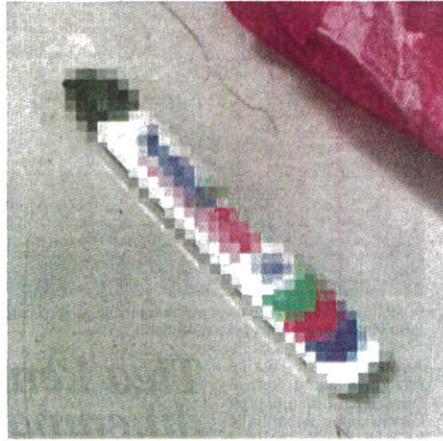
Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang (CAP) menggesa kerajaan mengeluarkan garis panduan khas kepada industri vape supaya tidak mencipta rokok elektronik menyerupai bentuk mengelirukan sehingga boleh menarik minat remaja dan kanak-kanak.

Pegawai Pendidikan CAP dan aktivis antimerokok, N V Subbarow berkata, pada masa ini banyak bentuk vape yang mengelirukan pengguna dijual berleluasa di pasaran.

"Sekarang semakin banyak 'inovasi' vape yang berbentuk telefon bimbit, jam, rantai kunci serta alat tulis mudah didapati di kedai.

"Bentuk vape itu memang boleh mengelirukan kerana pada asalnya kita lihat contohnya seperti pen atau *marker pen*, tetapi sebenarnya ia adalah vape

"Ini amat membimbangkan kerana taktik seumpama



ANTARA contoh vape berbentuk *marker pen* dikesan dibawa pelajar ke sekolah.

ma ini seolah-olah hendak menarik perhatian golongan muda terutama pelajar," katanya.

Beliau berkata demikian mengulas inovasi vape yang dikeluarkan dalam pelbagai bentuk terutama alat tulis dikesan dijual di pasaran.

Mengulas lanjut, Subbarow berkata, CAP menca-

dangkan kerajaan agar mengeluarkan garis panduan khas bagi mengekang industri mengeluarkan vape dalam rupa bentuk mengelirukan.

"Kita minta kerajaan terutama Kementerian Kesihatan (KKM) keluarkan satu garis panduan supaya membezakan peranti vape dengan barangan penggu-



SUBBAROW

na lain.

"Jika vape, hanya keluaran vape saja, jangan buat inovasi dengan menyerupai pelbagai bentuk yang boleh menarik perhatian anak muda terutama pelajar.

"Kita tengok isu ini hanya berlaku di Malaysia saja dan tidak di luar negara, jadi kita mahu kerajaan tegas tangani isu ini," katanya.

Katanya, kebimbangan trend itu banyak disuarakan guru serta ibu bapa kepada CAP berikutan peranti vape berkenaan mudah didapati di pasaran terbuka.

"Guru tidak boleh buat apa-apa, malah jika tindakan merampas vape itu dilakukan pun, tetapi pada akhirnya mereka perlu serahkan kepada ibu bapa juga.

"Jadi kita sarankan ibu bapa periksa beg anak dengan lebih kerap bagi memastikan tiada barang tidak sepatutnya dalam beg melainkan alatan tulis dan buku sekolah.

"Selain itu, advokasi perlu diperluaskan terutama kesedaran dari rumah amat penting bagi memberi pemahaman kepada pelajar bahawa tabiat menghisap vape atau merokok memberikan kesan kepada kesihatan mereka dan orang sekeliling," katanya.

Terdahulu, tular di media sosial mengenai vape dikeluarkan dalam bentuk alat tulis seperti *marker pen* yang dipercayai ditemui dalam kalangan pelajar.

Sebelum ini, media melaporkan vape atau rokok elektronik yang menyerupai alat permainan kanak-kanak bebas dijual di pasaran sehingga mengundang kebimbangan ramai.

AKHBAR : UTUSAN MALAYSIA
MUKA SURAT : 6
RUANGAN : DALAM NEGERI

6

Utusan Malaysia
JUMAAT • 4 OKTOBER 2024

Rombak petugas kesihatan senior di hospital elak buli

Oleh **AIMAN ALI**
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PETALING JAYA: Kementerian Kesihatan (KKM) digesa melakukan rombakan melibatkan pegawai kesihatan atau jururawat senior di setiap hospital kerajaan.

Ini berikutan terdapat dakuwaan kes buli masih lagi berlaku di Utara Semenanjung ketika ini melibatkan doktor pelatih selain kematian seorang pakar perubatan di Hospital Lahad Datu, Sabah pada 29 Ogos lalu.

Jurucakap Hartal Doktor Kontrak (HDK), Dr. Muhammad Yassin berkata, KKM harus mengambil tindakan tegas terhadap isu buli yang semakin membimbangkan.

“KKM perlu memandang isu ini dengan lebih serius dan perlu menghukum mereka yang bersalah. Jangan sembunyikan sebarang kes buli yang berlaku.

“Selain itu, rombakan boleh dilakukan sejajar dengan saranan Ketua Pengarah Perkhidmatan Awam, Datuk Seri Wan Ahmad Dahlan Abdul Aziz untuk membuat rombakan kerja dan perjawatan dalam setiap agensi,” katanya ketika dihubungi *Utusan Malaysia*.

Terdahulu, sekumpulan doktor pelatih di sebuah hospital daerah di utara Semenanjung mendakwa menjadi mangsa buli dengan bebanan kerja melampau.

Doktor pelatih berkenaan memberitahu, mereka dipaksa bekerja melebihi waktu kerja

sepatutnya dan pernah bertugas sehingga 24 jam sehari, tidak termasuk dipanggil bekerja (on call) tanpa mengira waktu.

Selain itu, mereka juga ditindas berkaitan hak kelayakan cuti tahunan serta sering dimaki hamun oleh pegawai perubatan senior termasuk jururawat jika ada kes pesakit yang di luar kuasa doktor pelatih.

Mengulas lanjut, Muhammad Yassin berkata, polisi sedia ada dalam menangani isu buli di tempat kerja masih lagi belum berjaya meskipun pasukan petugas untuk menyiasat kejadian buli dalam kementerian itu sudah ditubuhkan pada 2022.

“Polisi sedia ada masih belum mampu menangani isu buli ni.

KKM perlu melihat semula dapatan jawatankuasa menangani isu buli di kalangan pekerja kesihatan yang ditubuhkan pada 2022,” katanya.

Semalam, penubuhan pasukan petugas khas bebas KKM bagi menyiasat insiden kes kematian pakar perubatan patologi dari Hospital Lahad Datu, Sabah yang didakwa akibat dibuli di tempat kerja akan berkuat kuasa pada 10 Oktober 2024.

Menteri Kesihatan, Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad berkata, pasukan yang melibatkan lima ahli bebas bukan anggota KKM itu mempunyai pengetahuan dan kepakaran dalam pelbagai bidang seperti perubatan, psikiatri, patologi, kesihatan mental serta perlakuan buli.

AKHBAR : THE STAR
 MUKA SURAT : 1
 RUANGAN : MUKA HADAPAN

Asean+

Iswaran goes to jail

Former Singapore minister S. Iswaran jailed for improperly receiving gifts and obstructing justice in landmark case. >17

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Vape smokescreen

While most ecommerce sites and stores have stopped displaying the smoking and vaping products openly to comply with the Control of Smoking Products for Public Health Act 2024, which took effect on Oct 1, some are still selling such products under different guises. Anti-smoking activists want the government to stand firm on its six-month grace period before full enforcement begins. > See reports on page 5 by GERARD GIMINO, JUNAID IBRAHIM and RAGANANTHINI VETHASALAM



AKHBAR : THE STAR
MUKA SURAT : 5
RUANGAN : NATION

Full enforcement of Act 852 when grace period ends

PETALING JAYA: The full effect of the Control of Smoking Products for Public Health Act 2024 (Act 852) will kick in upon expiration of the grace period for industries to transition and adapt to the new law, says the Health Ministry (MOH).

"As previously mentioned, the MOH is giving a six-month grace period for industries and shop owners before full enforcement takes effect," the ministry said in a statement to *The Star*.

"During this period, the focus is on educational enforcement, offering guidance and educational materials to help businesses comply with the regulations.

"Briefings and support will be given to sellers and shop owners. Once the grace period ends, full enforcement of the law will commence," it added.

The ministry will carry out "educational enforcement" for regulations concerning the registration and display of smoking

products until March 31, while the grace period regarding packaging and labelling ends on Sept 30 next year.

"Educational enforcement refers to raising awareness and advocating to industries and shop owners selling smoking products to comply with regulations concerning the registration and display of these products," it said.

"This approach will help industries and shop owners understand the provisions in Act 852

before full enforcement is implemented."

Asked if it is necessary to allow manufacturers up to a year to change packaging and labels, the ministry said the grace period applies on a product-by-product basis.

"The one-year grace period, applied on a product-by-product basis, is crucial to give industries and shop owners adequate time to deplete their existing stock and transition to new packaging and

labelling requirements under Act 852," it said.

The Act, enforced on Oct 1, covers regulations on registration, sale, packaging, labelling, and prohibition of smoking in public places.

Among the requirements are for vape products to carry health warnings.

The first phase of the Act will include immediate action against smoking products that look like toys.

Most vape stores obey the law

But some online sellers find ways to evade bans

PETALING JAYA: It has been a positive start since the Control of Smoking Products for Public Health Act 2024 (Act 852) came into force on Oct 1.

Products related to smoking, previously found on ecommerce sites, have been removed from the catalogue of items while vape stores are adhering to the new law.

Search results for several vape brands also show that the products are no longer available for purchase.

Only one brand is still operating but it sells merchandise like lanyards, tote bags, pens and stickers.

On another ecommerce site, products for smokers are still available but users are required to state whether they are under or above 18 to view the items.

Those under 18 are restricted from viewing images and will be redirected to the homepage if they proceed with the purchase.

Nevertheless, there are unscrupulous folk finding ways to camouflage vaping products on

several ecommerce sites.

Instead of using the term vape, "perfume", "makeup sprays" and "deodorant" are phrases used online. The nozzles of the products are also censored in images.

Meanwhile, several physical vape shops in the Klang Valley have also begun to adhere to the new regulations pertaining to the promotion of the product despite being given a six-months respite.

Checks showed that some shops have removed their advertising materials and have pasted posters restricting those aged 18 and below from entering the premises.

"We removed the product banners outside the shop before the Oct 1 deadline.

"All our online transactions, both on ecommerce sites and through our hotline, have been scrapped as it is impossible to verify the buyer's age," said the operator who wanted to be known as Aidil.

He said those operating the cash register would verify the age of young buyers.

"We will ask for their identifica-

tion cards if we are unsure.

"There had been instances of schoolchildren, dressed in plain clothes, looking to buy vaping products but we turned them away," he added.

Another seller, Shafig, also removed banners from his shop before the dawn of October, adding that schoolchildren are not allowed in.

"We tell them to leave the premises immediately as we don't want trouble," he said.

Another seller, who declined to be named, said education and awareness programmes would be effective in curbing youngsters from picking up the smoking or vaping habit.

Malaysian Vape Chamber of Commerce secretary-general Ridhwan Rosli urged for clearer guidelines, claiming that the regulations were affecting retailers.

"This will disrupt business operations and severely impact sales. On top of that, the new guideline on nicotine concentration is not in line with consumer demand and products on shelves.

Enforcement of Control of Smoking Products for Public Health Act 2024 (Act 852)

Covers regulations on the registration, sale, packaging, labelling and prohibition of smoking in public places. The rules and orders that will be enforced include electronic cigarettes

Beginning Oct 1, 2024

- > Prohibition of smoking products from being sold in educational institutions, online platforms, markets and vending machines.
- > Prohibition of advertisements, promotions or sponsorships by smoking products

Beginning April 1, 2025

- > Smoking products in convenience stores must be placed in locked storage areas.
- > Stores specialising in smoking products must ensure the products cannot be seen from the outside.

Beginning Oct 1, 2025

- > All smoking product packaging must be plain and include text and layout for health warnings.
- > Terms like 'light', 'ultra light', 'mild', and 'special', among others, cannot be displayed.

Source: Health Ministry

The Star graphics

"Retailers have no idea how to manage their existing stock, and have not been given time to adjust to these drastic changes," he told *The Star*.

Disagreeing with the "current form" of the Act, Rosli said the Health Ministry had not entertained their feedback on the legislation.

"We strongly urge the ministry to review Act 852 and reconsider the display ban. This new law is simply not practical for the long-term viability of the industry.

"Retailers, particularly small businesses, will have to bear huge costs, whether it is in modifying fixtures or hiring additional staff to manage compliance," he said.

Say no to more delays, urge anti-tobacco advocates

PETALING JAYA: Authorities must not buckle under pressure to extend the grace period for enforcement regulations under the Control of Smoking Products for Public Health Act 2024 (Act 852), say anti-tobacco groups.

They said the six-month grace period for businesses to reposition smoking products at convenience stores is reasonable.

Malaysian Council for Tobacco Control (MCTC) president Dr M. Muralitharan said the six-month duration would allow businesses enough time to make the necessary changes for smoking product placements.

"While some may want enforcement to start immediately, it can be difficult, as well as unreasonable, for business owners to apply," he said.

However, he said, tobacco industry lobbyists may call for an extension of the enforcement grace period beyond the April 1 deadline next year.

"They may say they need more time, but the government has



More than enough: Anti-tobacco groups say the six-month grace period for businesses to reposition smoking products at convenience stores is reasonable. — MUHAMAD SHAHRIL ROSLI/*The Star*

given a reasonable landing time for businesses. It doesn't take six months to change a cabinet. That's the reality," he said.

Muralitharan said a holistic approach is necessary, from the ministry, industry players and

also the public, to make the country healthier.

He proposed community empowerment measures to aid the enforcement of the regulations.

"We have thousands of anti-smoking activists who can help

publicise instances of non-compliance," he said, referring to images and videos of non-compliance that were uploaded on social media by the public.

"(The) people power will play a big role. We are ready to assist and will be on the ground to provide education and awareness to business owners and the public," he said.

Consumers' Association of Penang senior education officer and anti-smoking activist N.V. Subbarow said the grace period should not be extended.

"More than enough time has been given. This is a public health matter. If we delay any longer, the situation will worsen," he said, adding that the authorities need to step up monitoring and enforcement at tourist spots and government offices.

Federation of Malaysian Consumers Associations Tobacco and Smoking Control coordinator Muhammad Sha'ani Abdullah said exemplary leadership is needed to discourage people from

lighting up in no-smoking zones.

"Government department heads should also be taken to task if there are people found smoking at premises under their jurisdiction," he said.

He suggested that business owners head enforcement regulations ahead of April 1.

Ikrum Health Malaysia president Dr Mohd Afiq Mohd Noor urged businesses to adapt to the new regulations under Act 852 within the grace period.

"Continuous awareness must be carried out by both the ministry and NGOs during this period," he said.

He said campaigns, especially on the harm of smoking, must be actively promoted among the public and industry players for the regulations to be carried out effectively.

"We also need a more efficient system to report those violating smoking regulations instead of the current method," he said, referring to the Health Ministry's Smoking Complaint line.

AKHBAR : THE STAR
MUKA SURAT : 8
RUANGAN : NATION

Cardiac facility pumping again

Serdang Heart Centre operation theatres 'running in full swing'

By RAGANANTHINI VETHASALAM
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PETALING JAYA: The operation theatres at the Sultan Idris Shah Hospital (HSIS) Heart Centre in Serdang, which were out of order several months ago due to maintenance issues, are now up and running.

"They are all fixed and now running in full swing," a source told *The Star*.

The source claims that the repairs took place more than a month ago.

The Star reported on May 14 that maintenance issues at the cardiac facility in Hospital Serdang had caused its four operating theatres (OTs) to be unusable, resulting in over 1,000 patients remaining on the waiting list for procedures.

At that time, only one of the operating theatres in the hospital's old building was functioning, leaving a long tally of patients on the waiting list.

Heart of the centre is not beating

Four operating theatres not operational from day one at Serdang Heart Centre

By RAGANANTHINI VETHASALAM
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PETALING JAYA: The Pusat Idris Shah Hospital Serdang (HSIS) Heart Centre, which was closed in December 2022, and was designed to replace dependant on Kuala Lumpur's National Heart Institute. But the heart of the centre is not beating.

In four operating theatres could be used as they are all facing maintenance issues.

The Sultan Idris Shah Hospital in Serdang for treating Coronary Artery Disease (CAD), which houses the centre, will carry out three heart surgeries a day at its old building. Even then, only one of its four ability operating theatres is operational.

Altogether, around 1,000 patients who need heart surgery have been put on a long waiting list of several months ago in the infrastructure.

out of functioning.

Sources say the four operation theatres at the new heart centre were not functioning due to issues like faulty air conditioning.

"Meanwhile, at the old hospital building, there are four operating theatres. But there have been problems too. They had work, only one theatre is still in use."

"We were running three operating theatres all this while because one had light and table issues and has been closed for the last one to three years."

"Earlier this year, it was reduced to two due to air conditioning problems. Since last week, we have been running only one operating theatre," they were added.

A total of eight surgeries can be performed in a day. All operating theatres are functional.

"For the new building, none of the new operating theatres has been used since the opening process and table and service.



stable elective cases while emergency cases could be treated immediately.

He said the health-care facility is equipped with a hybrid operating theatre - the first of its kind under the Health Ministry - and could benefit up to 200 cardiac patients per year.

The operating theatre are also equipped with sophisticated equipment which enables complex cases to be carried out there, he said.

The centre also has a coronary care unit, a paediatric intensive cardiac care unit, an intensive cardiac care unit and cardiac emergency department among others.

It was estimated that the number of heart procedures at the Sultan Idris Hospital would double from 30,000 a year to 60,000 with the new facility.

Apart from having 200 beds, the facility is also equipped with

diagnostic imaging four times cheaper than a normal MRI.

A senior hospital official, when contacted, said the air conditioning to new operating theatres had been repaired as at yesterday and would be functional once fresh breeze to repair the other units going on as well, he said.

The official mentioned that four cardiovascular operating theatres in the new hospital building were affected due to air conditioning problems. Two of those are now operational following repair works yesterday.

"The operation theatre or theatre cannot look like open to be operational," the source said, adding that the contractors are handling it.

The Selangor Health Department and the Health Ministry have yet to comment on the matter.

Apart from Serdang Hospital, there are 107 hospitals under the Health Ministry.

Maintenance problems, particularly air-conditioning issues, forced the 19-month-old cardiac facility to shut down its four OTs, leaving the hospital with only one functioning OT in its old building.

On June 7, Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad said three out of the four non-functional OTs in the Serdang Heart Centre have been working since June 5.

In July, *The Star* again reported that the Serdang Heart Centre ran into trouble again, about a month after repairs were done to its four non-functional OTs and surgery rooms.

The report, quoting sources, said the new wing's operating theatres had to be closed for three weeks from July 22 due to multiple electrical issues, resulting in surgeries grinding to a halt.

In response, Selangor Health Department director Dr Umni Kathom Shamsudin said the OTs were closed to prevent any risk to patients.

She said in a statement that the closure was due to repeated electrical system disruptions.

The Public Works Department is closely monitoring the contractor, who is conducting inspections to identify the root cause of the disruptions and making improvements to ensure that they do not recur, she said in a statement.

She added that the state Health Department acknowledged the matter following a report by *The Star* about the closure of operating rooms at the HSIS Heart Centre.

AKHBAR : THE STAR
MUKA SURAT : 15
RUANGAN : VIEWS

More questions about Rakan MOH

KUDOS to Dr Richard for raising questions about Rakan MOH, the Health Ministry's proposal to expand the full-paying patient (FPP) scheme in government hospitals ("Rakan MOH warrants deeper scrutiny", *The Star*, Oct 2; online at bit.ly/3XO50ut).

I, too, have questions: For instance, what are the possible negative effects the proposal could have on the roles of specialists in the public sector? Foremost is their teaching and training role, another is research, and there's also administration, which can take up much time, especially in large hospitals.

In the absence of reports on the FPP scheme, it is indeed foolhardy to expand the system and expect public support – especially the notion that there is revenue for the government for the taking.

On the contrary, an end to alleged leakages of public funds running to billions of ringgit annually would add to the money now being allocated in the national budget to the Health Ministry.

DATUK SERI DR T. DEVARAJ
George Town

Private healthcare plays vital role

THE private healthcare industry in Malaysia is often mischaracterised as profiteering from the sick without contributing meaningfully to the nation's welfare. This reductive view, however, ignores the essential role that private hospitals play in sustaining the healthcare system and supporting national economic growth.

Beyond the headlines and misconceptions lies a complex reality: Private healthcare is not only an economic powerhouse but a key pillar of the nation's health security.

Private hospitals are critical in relieving the immense pressure on the public healthcare system.

In 2021, Malaysia's health expenditure reached RM78.2bil, with 42.1% (RM32.96bil) coming from private sources, largely funded by out-of-pocket payments and insurance. Contrary to the belief that this is a drain on public resources, this spending actually fortifies the healthcare ecosystem by enabling access to advanced medical technologies, expanding treatment options, and facilitating specialised care that the public sector alone cannot provide.

Without this vital partnership, Malaysia's healthcare system would be at risk of collapse.

The private sector's economic

impact is equally substantial. Projections indicate that the private healthcare sector will grow at a compound annual growth rate of 8.3% until 2028. This growth, driven by increasing demand for healthcare services and advancements in medical technology, is set to generate RM1 trillion over the next 15 years, create 100,000 new jobs, and attract RM44bil in investments. These figures paint a picture of private healthcare not as a profiteer, but as a growth engine that uplifts the entire nation.

It is important to consider that Malaysia's economy thrives on a free market approach, where profit and societal value are not mutually exclusive. The notion that private healthcare's pursuit of profit is inherently unethical disregards the broader societal benefits it provides. Profit fuels reinvestment, innovation, and the continuous enhancement of healthcare services. In a capitalist system, profit is not a dirty word – it is what enables progress.

Moreover, vilifying private hospitals risks eroding trust and sowing division among Malaysians. This destructive narrative could undermine confidence in private healthcare's ability to support the national health agenda. What

would happen if this vital component of our healthcare system were to be diminished? Would public hospitals be able to absorb the millions of patients currently treated in private facilities? The answer is clear: the absence of private hospitals would not lead to improved healthcare; it would lead to an overwhelmed public system and deteriorating quality of care for all Malaysians.

Instead of framing private healthcare as a villain, we should ask deeper, more strategic questions. For instance, how can we ensure its continued contribution while making healthcare more accessible and affordable?

Shouldn't we explore a national insurance scheme to better balance costs and access? And more importantly, how can we strengthen our domestic pharmaceutical industry to safeguard against global price fluctuations and supply disruptions?

Ultimately, it is not private hospitals that pose the greatest threat to Malaysia's healthcare system. It is the failure to recognise their indispensable role in ensuring the health and wellbeing of the nation.

KAMAL AMZAN
Iskandar Puteri, Johor

AKHBAR : THE SUN
MUKA SURAT : 10
RUANGAN : SPEAK UP

LETTERS letters@thesundaily.com

Rethink approach on cigarette display bans

AS a retailer who values responsible business practices, I support efforts to curb smoking. However, the upcoming cigarette display ban leaves me questioning whether it will achieve its goals or simply encourage more harmful behaviours.

The intention behind the display ban is clear – to reduce smoking rates, especially among the younger generation. But we need to consider the unintended consequences, especially in Malaysia, where illicit trade is already a significant issue and enforcement is lax.

By pushing cigarettes out of sight, are we really making them safer or are we just driving them underground?

Take Singapore, for example. Despite its strict enforcement culture, Singapore, which has banned point-of-sale display of tobacco products since August 2017, still faces a thriving illicit market for cigarettes and vape products.

It is reported that illegal cigarettes are sold through informal channels like Telegram, undermining the very goals the ban seeks to achieve.

Even with a highly regulated market and stringent penalties, Singapore has not been able to eliminate illegal sales. If such enforcement challenges exist in a place as strict as Singapore, it is reasonable to ask: Can Malaysia expect a better outcome?

When legal cigarettes are hidden from view, there is a risk that illicit alternatives, which are unregulated and far more dangerous, will become more attractive.

Counterfeit products may contain higher levels of harmful substances, and consumers may unknowingly purchase cigarettes laced with toxic chemicals.

Without proper scrutiny, these products could be sold at your local *kedai runcit* or *mamak* stalls. And when transactions are done hush-hush, how can anyone be sure of what is being sold? Could illegal substances or drugs sneak into the mix as well?

Let us not forget, when these sales go

underground, the government loses significant tax revenue – funds that could be used for public health or smoking cessation programmes.

The goal is to reduce cigarette consumption, and some argue that by not seeing cigarettes on display, fewer people will buy them. But let us be honest: For existing smokers, the habit will not just disappear. If they want cigarettes, they will find a way to get them whether through legal means or not.

The complexity of hiding cigarette displays may make the product seem more glamorous, especially to younger, curious individuals. The “forbidden fruit” effect is real.

Of course, there is the economic impact as well. Cigarette sales are expected to drop because of this ban, and while that may seem like a good thing on paper, it is not so simple.

A more balanced approach would involve regulating sales responsibly, such as tightening age restrictions or limiting certain types of promotional tactics, without driving the trade into the shadows. Rather than adopting measures that may backfire, let us explore policies that can keep cigarettes visible but responsibly controlled.

Retailers do not hide alcohol or condoms from plain sight in their stores. We need to focus on educating the public, especially young people, about the dangers of smoking, while simultaneously keeping the market transparent.

While the cigarette display ban aims to protect public health, it may lead to far worse outcomes.

Let us rethink this policy and focus on more sustainable solutions that regulate cigarette sales without pushing the problem out of sight and into the underground economy.

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