

# Penang health exco defends attendance at KL vape summit

By **Predeep Nambiar and Ainaa Aiman** - September 24, 2018 8:20 PM



*Penang health exco Dr Afif Bahardin's attendance at a vape summit in KL raised eyebrows.*

GEORGE TOWN: A Penang executive councillor in charge of health has defended his attendance at a vape summit in Kuala Lumpur recently, saying he was there to engage the business operators in getting vape products legalised and to remind vapers to be mindful of those who don't smoke.

Dr Afif Bahardin said while he was aware of the negative effects of smoking and vaping in general, it would be wrong not to engage them.

Speaking to FMT, he said if he were to shun them since vaping was unhealthy, the same logic could then be applied to those who consumed sugar in excess as it was also unhealthy.

"If that is the case, sugar is also bad, but should I stop going to the bakery? In the case of vaping, what is wrong in engaging them to be more responsible as a smoker and to be mindful of those who do not smoke?

"If you heard my speech at the summit, I spoke about Penang's 'bebas asap rokok' initiative and being a responsible smoker.

"We want responsible vapers, my conscience is clear. We want Penang to be a smoke-free state and at the same time tolerant of responsible smokers. I am taking the middle road on this.

"I am not endorsing the act of vaping, I am there to tell them that as a politician in a new Malaysia, I engage everyone, they are Malaysians too," he said when asked about why he attended the Malaysia International Variety Summit, or Mivas, at PWTC, on Sept 23.

Afif said while he was not a smoker or vaper, his major concern was legalising the vape businesses and implementing measures to monitor them for safety.

He said he was the first to engage the vape industry players in 2015 during the height of an intense debate on whether vaping should be banned.

Meanwhile, Malaysian Medical Association president Dr Mohamed Namazie Ibrahim said there was no such thing as "responsible smoking".

"Vaping has been shown to be hazardous to health. As a responsible member of the government, one should be careful."

He also recommends that the government bans vaping.

"Experience in Malaysia has shown that if it is regulated, the prevalence of its use increases," he said.

He adds that the matter had been discussed in detail in 2015 and the health ministry at the time recommended to the Cabinet to ban vaping.

Namazie cited a report by the World Health Organisation which found that the smoke from e-cigarettes still contained toxic particles.

It also reported that there was limited evidence that "vaping" could be a healthier alternative to smoking.

A vape-trade interest group estimates there are about 4,000 to 5,000 vape businesses as of last year, it was reported.

Vape businesses are allowed to ply their trade in all states in Malaysia, except in Johor, which has banned vaping.

In May 2016, two brothers who ran a vape business were fined RM1,500 at the Magistrate's Court for having 620 bottles of liquid nicotine in Shah Alam under Section 13 (a) of the Poisons Act 1952.

In Dec 2016, the government had announced that it would amend existing laws to regulate vaping, giving three federal ministries a mandate to do so.

The consumer affairs ministry will regulate and enforce safety standards, while the health ministry would regulate matters related to vapes containing nicotine.

The health ministry will also draft a new law to replace the 2004 Tobacco Control Regulations in two years.

The Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation (now MESTECC) was charged with coming up with standards for e-cigarettes.

There has been no news on the updated laws after the May 9 government change, while vape businesses expect the laws to kick in by 2019, the Malaysian Reserve reported.

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