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Vaping craze a booming business

More than a fad, vaping, industry insiders say, is a booming billion ringgit market here, second only to the United States. But, despite its rapid growth, the long-term health effects remain hazy. While many countries have either banned or regulated vaping, it's still a free-for-all industry here.



JAPAN
E-cigs with nicotine is banned.

HONG KONG
Classified e-cigarettes with nicotine as poisonous, and banned it in 2009.

PHILIPPINES
Davao City prohibits the use of e-cigarettes in all enclosed/public places.

BRUNEI
Sale is prohibited because it's considered an imitation of a tobacco product.

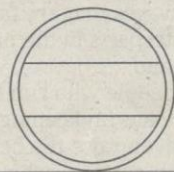
CAMBODIA
Ban on e-cigarettes and shisha was announced in 2014.

THAILAND
A ban on e-cigarettes was declared but there's no official order/policy yet.

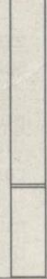
SINGAPORE
Banned in 2011 because it resembles a tobacco product.

Source: 'ELECTRONIC CIGARETTES IN ASIA - A Review of Promotions and Availability' report commissioned by WHO TFI to the Southeast Asia Tobacco Control Alliance.





Smokeless tobacco



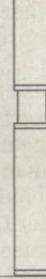
Cigarettes



Cigars



Pipe



e-cigs



Shisha/
Hookah

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VAPING outlets are mushrooming faster than you can count. And, cash registers are ringing louder than ever with more and more local manufacturers exporting their vape merchandise to countries like Japan and Taiwan.

Meanwhile, the Health Ministry is concerned about the growing trend among underage Malaysians.

Malaysia's half-a-billion ringgit vape industry is, after all, the second largest in the world after the United States, and the biggest in Asia, according to Ibrahim Mohamed, co-organiser of the recent Vaporizer Convention Kuala Lumpur 2015.

His estimates are based on the demand for Malaysian-made vaping items.

Vapers use electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS), or e-cigs, to deliver a vaporised mixture of chemicals to their lungs.

Each device has an electronic vaporisation system and controls, rechargeable batteries, and cartridges, which contain varying amounts of liquid nicotine to be vaporised.

When puffed on, ENDS heat up the liquid, converting it to a vapour, which is inhaled.

Vaping communities are concentrated in the Klang Valley and

Johor, but Ipoh, Kedah and Penang are catching up fast, he says.

He believes that there are a million vapers nationwide – about 10% of which are under 18.

“We got 35,000 visitors to attend Malaysia's first vaporiser convention.

“There are at least 1,000 vape shops nationwide and over 400 local mod (electronic vaporiser device) and juice (e-liquid) brands.

“Malaysian-made stuff are highly demanded abroad,” he says, adding that premium mods can cost up to RM4,000 with quality juices selling for up to RM300 per 30ml.

While most parents think it's a teenage fad, vapers claim that it's helped smokers, who industry players insist are their target market, kick the habit.

Aimran Abdul Rajak, partner at Vape Empire, the country's largest vape distributor and retail chain, says the Malaysian market is probably “bigger than the US and is still growing” in terms of brands and products sold.

He says a decent starter kit costs between RM200 and RM400.

“It's a very big industry, not a fad,” he says.

He says vaping has a large following here despite the lack of advertising because it helps smokers like himself quit.

Industry pioneer and Malaysia

E-Vaporizers & Tobacco Alternative Association president Allen Foo wants to work with the authorities and researchers studying the long-term effects of vaping.

He says the majority of people are either on the fence or pro-vaping but the industry must be regulated or it will collapse.

Now, distributors have hundreds of sellers below them and are taking orders via social media or over the phone, he says, adding that there must be “legit companies” so that we can make sure that what's sold is safe.

Calling for it to be regulated like the alcohol industry, he says it's dangerous now because we don't know who's buying, selling, manufacturing the mods or brewing the juices.

Aimran, however, feels that only juices that contain nicotine need to be regulated. He says juices are made from common food additives. If “anything funny” is added, it won't be vappable.

“We need some kind of regulation because vaping can really contribute to the health sector and economy.”

Acknowledging that the long-term effects of vaping is unknown, he however says the negative impact of cigarettes is well-documented.

“So, isn't vaping a better alternative?”



1&2 Trendy mods and juices are widely displayed and easily accessible.

3 There is a growing number of female vapers



Photos by AZMAN GHANI and VapeCon KL 2015