

# Moving From Tobacco Control to Tobacco Endgame in Malaysia

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## BACKGROUND

The tobacco epidemic is one of the biggest public health threats worldwide. Tobacco remains one of the few legally available products that cause significant harm not only to users but also to those exposed to second-hand smoke. Tobacco consumption, regardless of form or disguise, cigarettes, smokeless tobacco, water pipes commonly known as shishas, narghiles, or hubble-bubbles, is highly addictive due to nicotine in tobacco products and is deadly. Each year, tobacco use kills more than eight million people, including an estimated 1.3 million non-smokers who are exposed to second-hand smoke. Its use is a significant risk factor for cardiovascular, respiratory diseases, cancer, and many other debilitating health conditions. Beyond health effects, the socio-economic costs to individuals, families, businesses, governments, and health systems are substantial.

### Historical ‘No Smoking Day’ on 5th November 1986.

The Action on Smoking and Health Committee of the Malaysian Medical Association (ASH, MMA), in collaboration with the MMA Public Health Society (MMA PHS), demonstrated strong leadership in organising the inauguration of the first Malaysian ‘No Smoking Day’ on 5 November 1986 (<https://www.e-mjm.org/2015/v70s1/mjm-sept-suppl-2069.html>). Tun Dr Siti Hasmah officiated the landmark event. It was organised by ASH MMA, in collaboration with the PHS, the National Heart Association, the National Cancer Society, the Ministry of Health, and multiple sectors, including schools, hotels, and banks. Notably, ASH MMA conducted No Smoking Day without any fund from the Government. Despite limited resources, it achieved remarkable reach and success; 80% awareness was recorded across eight evaluation sites nationwide. Media coverage was extensive, with the campaign featured on the

front page of major newspapers and shared on the radio and television. The success and public reception were such that ASH MMA received requests to expand the initiative into a whole week. Significantly, this national campaign preceded the global call for tobacco control awareness by the World Health Organization (WHO). The World Health Assembly (WHA) adopted Resolution WHA40.38 later. In 1987, the WHA passed Resolution WHA40.38 in 1987, declaring 7 April 1988 to be the first “World No-Smoking Day.” This was followed by resolution WHA42.19, which was passed in 1988, calling for the World No Tobacco Day celebration every year on 31 May. Since then, the WHO has supported World No Tobacco Day (WNTD) annually, linking it to a different tobacco-related theme each year.

The first ‘No Smoking Week’ was held from 1 to 7 November 1987. With the theme ‘Help a Friend Quit Smoking.’ The campaign unfolded during a sensitive period, as Operation Lalang, was proclaimed under the Internal Security Act (ISA), was declared on 27 October 1987, under the Internal Security Act (ISA). The Operation Lalang resulted in a sweeping crackdown on opposition parties and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), with more than a hundred Malaysians detained without trial. The prevailing climate of fear and uncertainty had a chilling effect on the civil society. Despite the tension, the campaign proceeded. Due to safety concerns, the Chairman of ASH MMA called from Ipoh and said that he would not be attending the launch, entrusting Dr. Lekhraj Rampal



The First Malaysian ‘No Smoking Day’ on 5<sup>th</sup> November 1986



Ban on Smoking in Restaurants January 1988



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(as the Secretary of ASH MMA and Chairman of the Public Health Society) to lead the event. A pivotal moment occurred during the launch when Datuk K Pathmanaban publicly declared his intention to quit smoking during the press interview. He not only followed through but also permanently ceased smoking, garnering positive publicity for himself and the Malaysian Medical Association. Throughout this period, MMA remained a steadfast supporter and sponsor of all ASH MMA activities. ASH MMA remained steadfast in its activities and initiatives, reinforcing its commitment to tobacco control despite external pressure. Over the decades, ASH MMA continued to be at the forefront of tobacco advocacy in Malaysia. In collaboration with key stakeholders, including the Ministry of Health (MOH), the Ministry of Education (MOE), Malaysian Council for Tobacco Control (MCTC), Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), NGOs, schools, and banks the following were achieved in 1983 National workshop on smoking control; 1986 National No Smoking Day; 1987 National No Smoking Week; 1988 National No Smoking Week; 1989 National No Smoking Week; 1990 National No Smoking Week; 1991 National No Smoking Week; 1992 National No Smoking Week, the National No Smoking Week in 1993; 1998 International Quit and Win; 1999 National No Smoking Day; 2000 International Quit and Win; 2002 International Quit and Win; 2004 International Quit and Win; 2005 National No Smoking Day; 2006 International Quit and Win; 2016 World No Smoking Day; 2017 World No Smoking Day; 2018 World No Smoking Day; 2019 World No Smoking Day; 2020 World No Smoking Day; 2022 World No Smoking Day, and the 2023 World No Smoking Day. A landmark policy change attributed to ASH MMA's advocacy was the ban on smoking aboard Malaysian Airlines (MAS) flights implemented on January 1, 1996. Initially covering all domestic flights and most international routes. This sets a precedent for smoke-free transport policies in the region. Central to these efforts has been Professor Datuk Dr Lekharaj Rampal, a committed tobacco control advocate for over 30 years. His roles include Secretary, ASH MMA (1982-1993); Chairman, ASH MMA (1993-1994, 1999-2008, 2013-2022); Advisor (2022-2025); and Deputy President, MCTC (2016-2018); and President, MCTC (2018-2022). MCTC comprises more than 40 NGOs related to Tobacco Control. ASH MMA has played a transformative role in Malaysia's Tobacco control movement, not only in public health education but more significantly through its relentless pursuit of policy reform. Recognising that health education alone could not withstand the aggressive tactics of the global tobacco industry. ASH MMA, under the leadership of Dr. Rampal, championed structural and legislative solutions, such as tax increases, comprehensive bans on tobacco advertising, plain packaging, smoke-free public spaces, and a ban on vaping. ASH MMA has consistently been ahead of its time, proposing policies long before they became mainstream discourse. Star with Example, Dr. Rampal advocated for raising the smoking age to 21, long before it became part of our legislative consideration. Similarly, ASH MMA lobbied for the criminalisation of illegal cigarette trade as early as the 1990s. Today, many of those ideas have found their place within the framework of 'The Control of Smoking Products for Public Health Act 2024', as a testament to this vision and consistency. Malaysia's involvement in the International

Quit and Win (IQSW) further underscored its commitment to tobacco control.

Recognised for his experience and leadership, Dr. Rampal was invited by Prof. Dr. Pekkias Puska, Chairman of the IQSW campaign in Malaysia, as part of the global initiative. IQSW was the most significant practical international initiative for smoking cessation. The number of countries and smokers in the IQSW Smoking Cessation contest increased from 13 countries in 1994 to 25 in 1996 to 50 countries in 1998, 70 countries in 2000, and 76 countries in 2002. In 2004, 71 countries with 700,000 smokers took part, compared to 13 countries with 60,000 smokers in 1994. In Malaysia, the IQSW Smoking Cessation contest campaigns were held in collaboration with the MOH in 1998, 2000, 2002, and 2004. It was held together with World No Tobacco Day. The number of smokers participated in the IQSW Smoking Cessation contest increased from 945 in 1998 to 1,155 people in 2000, and to over 2,000 smokers in 2002 from all parts of the country. Several activities were carried out, including talks, exhibitions, and National Art competitions. A large number of participants agreed to give up smoking for at least one month. The art competition was also a considerable success. There was also broad coverage by the press, radio, and TV. For several weeks, feature stories and letters commented on smoking and its problems. The World No Tobacco Day and the prize-giving ceremony for the winners of IQSW in 2004 and 2006 were held at UPM. More than 800 people, including the Vice Chancellor and staff, attended each of the functions. In 2004, 2006, 2016, 2017, and 2018, the World No Tobacco Day and the prize-giving ceremony for the winners of the Art competition were held at UPM. There was good mass media coverage on the World No Tobacco Day and the IQSW contest. A significant outcome of ASH MMA's persistent advocacy materialised in 2000, when the MOH first established the "Quit Smoking Clinic" following ASH MMA's recommendation, making smoking cessation services accessible to everyone. Since then, the MOH has established a Tobacco Control Unit and the Framework Convention for Tobacco Control (FCTC) Secretariat. These developments led to the establishment of more than 300 quit-smoking clinics and the integration of cessation services in 32 hospitals across the nation. These clinics offer counselling, support, and pharmacological treatments, such as nicotine replacement therapy (NRT). These initiatives play a vital role in helping individuals stop smoking by providing non-pharmacological and pharmacological interventions.

#### **The Tak Nak Campaign 2004**

The Tak Nak Campaign, launched in 2004 by Tun Abdullah bin Haji Ahmad Badawi, the then Prime Minister of Malaysia, marked another significant milestone in the country's tobacco control efforts. The launch event drew over 2,500 participants and garnered extensive media coverage.

It was an enormous success. For the launch, over 2,500 participants attended and received extensive media coverage in newspapers and on TV channels. The campaign was branded with the slogan "Tak nak", which translates to "Say no to Smoking". The campaign was branded with the slogan "Tak nak", which translates to "Say no to Smoking". It was designed to instil a strong anti-smoking message, particularly



Prof Datuk Dr Lekhraj Rampal President MCTC, briefing YB Datuk Seri Dr Haji Dzulkefly, Minister of Health during the historical MCTC meeting at Parliament House in 2018.

among young people. During the first year, the Tak Nak Campaign was widely regarded as successful in achieving its stated goals, generating substantial public support and engagement. Critics and those with a vested interest may say it was a failure. The then-new Minister of Health, Malaysia, expressed the view that the campaign was not successful. This led to a loss of focus on its continuation at a national level by the MOH. ASH MMA, realising the impact of the campaign, however, continued to use the slogan 'Tak Nak' in their campaigns.

#### Call for ban on e-cigarettes, vapes, and shishas

Between May 2015 and March 2016, several meetings were organised by the MOH related to the problem of e-cigarettes, vapes, and shishas. Prof. Dr. Lekhraj Rampal, as Chairman of ASH MMA, recommended to the Government to ban e-cigarettes, vapes, and shisha. The Director General and Deputy Director General (Public Health) of MOH had also recommended a ban on e-cigarettes, vapes, and shishas. The Minister of Health recommended to the Cabinet of Malaysia to ban e-cigarettes, vapes and shisha. However, the Cabinet of Malaysia decided instead to regulate e-cigarettes, vapes, and shishas. MMA and MCTC, since then, have consistently recommended to the Government to ban e-cigarettes, Vapes, and Shisha. His Royal Highness Sultan Ibrahim ibni Almarhum Sultan Iskandar, the current King of Malaysia had strongly advocated for a ban on the sale of e-cigarettes and vapes and ordered a ban on their sale in the State of Johor. Several NGOs and personalities from MCTC participated in television and mass media programs to discuss why the Government should ban it. In recent years, several states in Malaysia have banned the sale of e-cigarettes, vapes, & Shisha.

#### Historical World No Tobacco Day 2018

World No Tobacco Day 2018 was held on 31 May 2018 at the main hall, Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, UPM, marking a significant turning point in Malaysia's tobacco control landscape. Themed 'tobacco breaks Hearts', the event was historical in that it received direct support of Datuk Seri Haji Dr. Dzulkefly Bin Ahmad, Minister of Health. This was the first Minister of Health in the last four decades that a Minister of Health had positively and promptly responded to the invitation of ASH MMA to launch World No Tobacco

Day. During this event, Prof Dr Rampal, in his capacity as President of MCTC and Chairman of ASH MMA, presented a set of strategic recommendations to the Minister on behalf of MCTC and ASH MMA. These included expedite the tabling of a comprehensive Tobacco Control Act in Parliament, raising the legal age for sale and purchase of tobacco and tobacco products from 18 years to 21 years, Increase the tax on tobacco and tobacco products to at least 70% of the retail price as per the World Bank's recommendation, channel the Tax (Tax Haram) on Tobacco products in to for prevention programs and for Smokers who want to quit, enforce a ban on display of tobacco and tobacco products at the point of sale locations. Additional recommendations include ratifying the Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products adopted by the Conference of the Parties to the WHO FCTC, which will help to eliminate illicit trade in tobacco products by all SEA countries, increasing the penalties for offences related to illegal trade in tobacco and tobacco products, expedite in the implementation of licensing of tobacco and tobacco products, and enforce no smoking at all workplace environments as provided for in the Occupational Safety and Health Act 1994 and government service circulars. This advocacy momentum continued with a follow-up meeting with the Minister of Health in the meeting room at the Parliament House.

Under the leadership of Datuk Seri Haji Dr Dzulkefly, one of the most impactful policies was a ban on smoking at all restaurants and other eateries, including open-air hawker stalls, which went into effect on 1 January 2019. The Minister also assured Prof. Dr. Lekhraj Rampal at the WHO FCTC steering committee meeting that the new Tobacco Act will be passed in Parliament by the end of 2019. However, this did not occur due to the political instability and frequent changes in government and the Minister of Health Datuk Seri Haji Dr Dzulkefly (from May 2018 to February 2020), Dato' Sri Dr. Adham (from 10 March 2020 to 16 August 2021), YB Mr Khairy Jamaluddin, Minister of Health (from August 2021 to November 2022) and Datuk Seri Haji Dr Dzulkefly (second term since 12 December 2023). During the period 2019/2020, Tobacco Control activities were further affected due to the COVID-19 Outbreak. On 13 January 2022, the President of MCTC, along with his committee, was invited to a meeting with YB Khairy Jamaluddin, Minister of Health, the Director General of Health, and Senior staff of the FCTC in Putrajaya. The President of MCTC briefed the Minister on the History of Tobacco Control in Malaysia and the MCTC's recommendations to the Government of Malaysia, which had been presented to the earlier Minister of Health. YB Mr Khairy Jamaluddin was positive, but his tenure as a Minister was too brief to be able to implement the substantial tobacco control policy reforms. The World No Tobacco Day 2022, with the Theme 'Towards A Smoke-Free Generation,' was jointly launched by the Minister of Health, YB. Khairy Jamaluddin and YB. Senator Ustaz Datuk Haji Idris Ahmad, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department for Religious Affairs, on 22 April 2022. The campaign aimed to empower and support tobacco users attending religious places, on their quitting journey. This was followed by another World No Tobacco Day 2022 event launched by YB. Khairy Jamaluddin, Minister of Health, and Datuk Dr Mohd Radzi bin Md. Jidin, Senior Minister of Education, Malaysia. The

objectives were to discourage youth from taking up smoking and those who had started smoking to quit, increase awareness among the community about the hazards of tobacco, and promote the community's understanding of the importance of a tobacco-free environment. The activity targeted three categories: Primary, Secondary schools, and the Public. ASH MMA organised the National Art (Poster) Competition in collaboration with the Ministry of Education (MOE). There was a total of 9,659 entries for the National Art Competition.

The World No Tobacco Day 2023 was held at Dewan Hang Tuah, Malacca. It was organised by ASH MMA in collaboration with MCTC and NCSM. The event was attended by approximately 500 people: VIP guests, teachers, students, winners of the art competition, and their parents. A series of webinars and seminars on several topics related to smoking and health were held.

### Malaysia Book of Records

ASH MMA also organised the National Art Competition in collaboration with the Ministry of Education. The competition entered the Malaysia Book of Records for the Most Anti-Smoking Art Poster Competition. There were 24,248 entries. The certificate was presented at the Malaysia Book of Records Office in Kuala Lumpur on 23 May 2023. The earlier record was 13,300 participants in 2018, organised by ASH MMA in collaboration with the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, UPM.

The Control of Smoking Products for Public Health Act 2024 The close collaboration between the Minister and the MOH, ASM MMA, and MCTC has become even more focused in recent years, as Malaysia began drafting what became Act 852. It was necessary, bold, and disruptive, and it was needed. It has become a comprehensive legislation covering conventional cigarettes, e-cigarettes, vape products, and future nicotine devices, which was conceived as part of a broader strategy to push Malaysia toward a Tobacco End Game. And few people understood this better than the Minister of Health, MCTC, and MMA. Professor Rampal became a pillar of support, technically, morally, and politically, helping build bridges between stakeholders, guiding scientific rationale, and amplifying the public health urgency. Through his leadership, the message was clear: public health must be governed by principle, not expediency alone. MCTC under the leadership of Prof. Rampal's advocacy for Act 852, was not about enacting another law; it was about enshrining a legacy of protection for future generations. On 1 October 2024, the Control of Smoking Products for Public Health Act 2024 (ACT 852), came into force. It is the primary legislation governing tobacco control in Malaysia. It regulates, among other things, smoke-free environments; tobacco advertising, promotion, and sponsorship; tobacco packaging and labelling; sales restrictions, content, and emissions regulation; and disclosure. It regulates all smoking products, including tobacco products, smoking substances, and substitute tobacco products. E-cigarettes and heated tobacco products, as well as traditional tobacco products are also regulated under this Act. The regulations that have been issued under the Act include Control of Smoking Products for Public

Health (Registration of Tobacco Product, Smoking Substance and Substitute Tobacco Product) Regulations 2024, the Control of Smoking Products for Public Health (Packaging and Labelling) Regulations 2024, the Control of Smoking Products for Public Health (Warning Sign of Prohibition of Smoking) Regulations 2024, Control of Smoking Products for Public Health (Control of Sale) Regulations 2024, and the Control of Smoking Products for Public Health (Declaration of Non-Smoking Area or Place) Order 2024. This Act and its implementation regulations replace the earlier Control of Tobacco Product Regulations 2004 (and amendments) that were issued under the Food Act of 1983.

The passing of Act 852 is a milestone, but it was also a promise: that the Malaysians will continue what Professor Rampal and his generation started. That we will not falter in the face of industry pressure, policy fatigue, or social apathy. That we will end this epidemic not with silence, but with science, solidarity, and strength.

### MOVING FROM TOBACCO CONTROL TO TOBACCO ENDGAME

Endgame generally refers to a goal to reduce smoking prevalence to less than 5% by a specific year. The strategies aim to rapidly and permanently reduce tobacco use to minimal levels, effectively ending the tobacco epidemic, which refers to the situation where the tobacco epidemic is to be ended rather than controlled. Malaysia has set a target to reduce the prevalence rate to less than 15% by 2025 and to less than 5% by 2040. We are now at a critical juncture. We have achieved substantial progress over the years, and more recently, with the passage of the Control of Smoking Products for Public Health 2024 (Act 852). For Malaysia to be "A Smoke Free and Healthy Nation," a paradigm shift is needed in developing regulatory reduction in demand-supply strategies to address addictive substances.

There is a need for a paradigm shift from a focus on cure and care in the presence of ill health to promoting and maintaining good health. There is a need for a whole-of-government and community approach. There is a need for action by the entire government, including ministers, Members of Parliament, and State Assemblies. The politicians, NGOs, health care providers, community leaders, mass media, and the population must cooperate with the Government. Their roles include advocacy, community leadership, educational, catalyst, capacity building and training, Research, and Complementary roles. They must understand that countering the tobacco industry's tactics and practices is crucial for the success of tobacco control policies. It is also essential to realise that tobacco products are the only legally available products that can kill up to one-half of their regular users if consumed as recommended by the manufacturer. The industry must also play its role as a responsible corporation and work towards eliminating this menace. In Malaysia, it is estimated that 829,000 students are enrolled in primary and secondary schools. This includes both government and private institutions. Most of these students, about 3,085,000, are enrolled in primary education, and over 1.2 million are pursuing tertiary education. There have been reports in the mass media that there are students

who smoke and vape. There must be a paradigm shift in the policies of the Ministry of Education; they must play their role and be more involved in this National problem. They must not only be aware but also understand and participate in the strategies and processes. The University staff in Malaysia, encompassing both academic and administrative personnel, must play a more initiative-taking role. The Ministry of Digital is committed to developing artificial intelligence (AI) talent and integrating technology into daily life. It plays a significant role in tackling the number one killer in Malaysia. The Ministry initiatives should include a collaboration with the MOH and community leaders to train participants in AI, providing a platform for talent development, and driving AI transformation across sectors. They must play a role in the collaboration of the MOH in countering the tobacco industry's exploitation of AI to target vulnerable populations and undermine policies. The Ministry of Local Government should play a more active role in enforcing the provisions under ACT 852. The Ministry of Finance's role should not be limited to developing economic policy but also lead to a healthy Nation. MMA has been recommending increasing taxes on tobacco products as a strategy for reducing smoking rates in Malaysia. It is widely regarded as a highly effective strategy for reducing tobacco use and its consequences. Higher prices make tobacco less affordable, leading to decreased consumption, particularly among young people and low-income populations. At the recommendation of MMA, the Government of Malaysia decided to increase the

tobacco tax and later chose to tax smoking, liquor, and gambling, and called it the Tax Haram (Sin tax). The increased tobacco taxes generate revenue amounting to billions of ringgits. Currently, instead of using this increased revenue to fund public health programs aimed at further reducing tobacco use, it has been channeled to the Government's Consolidated Fund. In this central account, all government revenues and receipts are deposited. The World Bank has recommended that the tax on tobacco and tobacco products be at least 70% of the retail price. At several meetings of the WHO FCTC Steering Committee at the MOH, in the presence of a representative from the Ministry of Finance, I have inquired why the tax has not been increased in the last few years. I have also asked why the money collected from the Tax Haram on Tobacco products is not used for prevention, for smokers who want to quit, and for the prevention of non-smokers from starting smoking. I have also inquired whether the Ministry of Finance has informed the public that the revenue from Sin Tax is channeled to the Government Consolidated Fund. In this central account, all revenues and receipts are deposited. The revenue generated from the syntax was to fund public health programs aim at reducing tobacco, alcohol, and gambling. The representative has, to this day, not given a satisfactory answer. Every Malaysian has a role to play in reaching the target set for the endgame. We all need to be more proactive.