

'Healthcare travel sector not affected by 6% SST'

GEORGE TOWN: The 6% sales and service tax (SST) imposed on foreign patients seeking treatment in Malaysia has not affected the healthcare travel sector, says Datuk Seri Amir Hamzah Azizan.

The Finance Minister II said the tax on non-citizens had not dampened demand with private hospitals nationwide continuing to receive large numbers of patients.

"In Penang, medical tourism is still strong with plenty of overseas patients in private hospitals

here. Malaysia continues to offer quality healthcare at reasonable prices.

"Even in private hospitals in Johor and the Klang Valley, there is growing demand from foreign patients.

"Many of them are coming to Malaysia specifically for medical treatment," he told a press conference after visiting the Intel Pelican Project in Bayan Lepas yesterday.

Amir Hamzah said Malaysia remains an increasingly popular

destination for healthcare travellers and the industry should continue to be supported.

He said the SST was introduced to strengthen the government's revenue base and expand its fiscal position.

"This was discussed over the past few years before it was introduced.

"Throughout the process, we carefully studied the impact to ensure it would not burden Malaysians, which is why exemp-

tions are given to citizens," he said.

Beginning July 1 last year, private healthcare providers with annual revenue exceeding RM1.5mil are required to impose a 6% tax on services provided to non-citizens.

Malaysians are exempt, including for traditional and allied health services.

This year is Malaysia Medical Tourism Year, on top of Visit Malaysia 2026.

Calls for answers from aesthetic medicine academy

By ALLISON LAI
allison@thestar.com.my

KUALA LUMPUR: An academy at the centre of controversial aesthetic medicine courses should come forward to clarify issues surrounding its training programmes, says Datuk Seri Michael Chong.

The MCA Public Services and Complaints Department head said this should be done following public complaints, despite a recent statement issued by the academy.

"Important questions were not answered. There should be clarification from the company.

"They should come forward and explain," Chong said during a press conference at Wisma MCA yesterday.

Chong said he sympathised with the complainants, many of whom had spent large sums of money hoping to pursue careers in aesthetic medicine.

"They wanted to fulfil their dream of becoming aesthetic medicine practitioners, but now many are worried the qualifications may not even be recognised," he said.

Chong said his department had

received seven police reports from complainants, and he called on others who may have been affected to come forward.

He added that the department would continue pursuing the matter to prevent more victims from suffering losses.

The issue surrounding the academy surfaced yesterday after several individuals claimed they had spent between RM100,000 and RM180,000 to enrol in aesthetic medicine courses offered by the academy.

Several individuals claimed they were promised professional qualifications and certifications linked to aesthetic medicine, while others said classes had yet to begin despite payments having been made.

The issue later drew wider attention after Universiti Malaya (UM) clarified that it had no involvement in the academy's courses or certificates being circulated online.

Following reports in the media and the statement issued by UM, the academy on May 14 issued a statement defending its programmes, saying participants who completed all training modules and fully paid their fees



Dubious courses: (Seated, from left) Lawyer Ivan Tan Kai Yong, Chong, Hor and Dr Ungku Mohd Shahrin, together with the victims (face covered). — LOW LAY PHON/The Star

would receive certificates issued under its own rules and regulations.

The academy acknowledged that its courses did not come under the purview of the Higher Education Ministry (MOHE) or the Malaysian Medical Council (MMC), and reserved its right to take action for any loss of reputation.

Meanwhile, the department's legal counsel, Esther Hor, said questions were raised over the authorisation of the courses, why needles were used in medical procedures allegedly conducted in hotels, and the use of certificates

purportedly linked to a public university.

Hor said the academy, in its statement, claimed its courses were conducted according to its own internal rules and regulations, and that its programmes did not fall under the purview of MOHE or MMC.

"If it is not under MOHE or MMC, then under which authority?"

"Who is the accreditation body for these courses?" she questioned.

Pertubuhan Doktor Estetik Berdaftar Malaysia president Dr

Ungku Muhammad Shahrin, who was present at the press conference, noted that procedures involving injections, Botox and thread treatments could only be performed by qualified and registered medical practitioners.

"The moment you start injecting and applying procedures on patients, this is where all the rules and regulations come in," he said.

He added that medical procedures should only be conducted at licensed medical premises equipped to handle emergencies, not hotels or temporary training venues.

Dengue still health priority in Klang despite fewer cases

By EDWARD RAJENDRA
edward@thestar.com.my

KLANG district has recorded an average of 83 dengue cases per week since Jan 1, indicating steady transmission across the city, according to health officials.

Klang District Health Department (PKD) officer Dr Noriah Ismail said this weekly average over the 19-week period made the disease a continuing public health priority.

Speaking at a “gotong-royong for a dengue-free community” event at Prima Bayu Apartments in Bayu Tinggi, she said high-density residential buildings presented distinct operational challenges for containment teams.

“Health inspectors are able to manage active clusters more effectively in landed neighbourhoods compared to strata properties,” she said.

Dr Noriah added that the close proximity in apartment living fed the prevalence of the disease.

PKD reported two deaths for the period ending May 17, compared to one during the corresponding period last year.



Dr Noriah: Dengue cases can be high in crowded living spaces.

The authorities noted that there was an overall decline in total infections, which fell to 1,583 cases from 2,050 recorded during the same period last year.

Klang Royal City Council (MBDK) Health Department director Azmi Muji said the district recorded 4,207 cases across the whole of 2025.

He said Prima Bayu Apartments remained a recurrent focus for health monitoring, having registered 23 cases in 2023, 56 in 2024 and 25 last year.

He said MBDK and PKD con-



A PKD vector unit health inspector among staff checking for mosquito-breeding sites in an apartment at Prima Bayu during the community event. — YAP CHEE HONG/The Star

tinue to run targeted prevention operations throughout the district to clear breeding grounds.

Commenting on the *gotong-royong*, which included dissemination of information on Aedes mosquito and the prevention measures, MBDK Environmental

Health assistant officer Rasyidah Ain Mohamad Soib said there was good response from residents.

“Search-and-destroy activities to eliminate dengue larvae were also carried out during the event,” she said.

When wellness becomes pressure

SCROLL through social media today and one might think modern wellness comes in capsule form. Collagen powders, magnesium gummies, probiotics, hormone-balancing drinks and "cortisol support" supplements now occupy the shelves, handbags and bedside tables of many women.

The global dietary supplement market, estimated to be worth more than RM800 billion, continues to expand rapidly, with women representing one of its largest consumer groups.

Beauty supplements alone are projected to grow substantially over the next decade, fuelled by social media trends surrounding "glow", anti-ageing and wellness aesthetics.

Wellness influencers carefully arrange pastel-coloured vitamins beside skincare products, iced matcha and scented candles, presenting health not merely as a medical goal but as an aesthetic lifestyle.

At first glance, there is nothing inherently wrong with this. Many supplements do have legitimate medical value. Iron deficiency remains one of the most common nutritional deficiencies among women worldwide, particularly among women of reproductive age.

Vitamin D insufficiency is increasingly recognised across both developed and developing countries, including Malaysia.

Folate supplementation before and during early pregnancy significantly reduces neural tube defects, while calcium and vitamin D remain important for bone health, especially among postmenopausal women.

Certain supplements also carry stronger evidence than others. Omega-3 fatty acids have been associated with cardiovascular benefits in selected populations.

Probiotics may help specific gastrointestinal conditions. Magnesium supplementation may benefit individuals with true deficiency or certain medical conditions. However, evidence for many commercial "wellness" supplements marketed for

hormone balance, detoxification, anti-ageing or stress reduction remains limited, inconsistent or heavily influenced by marketing claims.

Despite this, supplement consumption continues to rise. Malaysian studies have shown that women are significantly more likely than men to consume dietary supplements, particularly products related to skin health, weight management, energy enhancement and anti-ageing.

Social media platforms have further amplified this behaviour, transforming supplements from healthcare products into lifestyle accessories. Yet something about the modern wellness culture deserves deeper reflection.

Women today are no longer expected merely to function. They are expected to function beautifully.

To be healthy is no longer enough.

Women are now encouraged to become constantly optimised versions of themselves such as energetic, emotionally regulated, hormonally balanced, mentally resilient, physically attractive and perpetually youthful.

Fatigue is quickly interpreted as deficiency. Stress becomes "cortisol imbalance". Normal ageing becomes an urgent anti-ageing battle.

At the same time, women are also experiencing rising psychological strain. Global reports continue to show increasing levels of stress, burnout and emotional exhaustion among women balancing professional responsibilities, caregiving roles and societal expectations.

In many countries, women consistently report higher stress levels and poorer work-life balance compared with men. Somewhere along the way, wellness quietly transformed into pressure.

The modern woman carries many invisible responsibilities. She is often expected to excel professionally while remaining emotionally available to her family, socially present, physically attractive and psychologically composed.

Even rest itself has become

"A woman stirring collagen into her morning drink may not merely be seeking better skin. She may be searching for a small sense of restoration in an exhausting world."



Malaysian studies have shown that women are significantly more likely than men to consume dietary supplements.

performative. One must not simply recover, but recover elegantly through wellness routines, sleep supplements, Pilates memberships and carefully curated self-care rituals.

In this environment, supplements become more than nutrition. They become symbols of control, hope and self-improvement. Sometimes, the ritual itself matters as much as the capsule.

A woman stirring collagen into her morning drink may not merely be seeking better skin. She may be searching for a small sense of restoration in an exhausting world. This is perhaps why the wellness industry resonates so deeply with women. It does not simply sell vitamins. It sells aspiration in which the promise of becoming calmer, prettier, healthier, softer, stronger and somehow more "put together".

But medicine must also ask subjective questions. Are women truly becoming healthier, or are they becoming increasingly anxious about achieving an impossible standard of wellness? Are supplements supporting women's health, or are they quietly

commercialising women's exhaustion and insecurities?

Not every tired woman is magnesium deficient. Not every bloated woman has a hormone disorder. Sometimes, the problem is not biological inadequacy, but chronic over-extension. Sometimes, women are simply tired in ways vitamins cannot fully fix.

This does not mean supplements are useless. Many are still evidence-based and beneficial when appropriately used. However, health professionals and society alike must be careful not to medicalise every ordinary human experience, particularly those shaped by modern lifestyle pressures.

The real issue is not whether women should take supplements. Perhaps the deeper question is why modern womanhood increasingly feels impossible without them.

Dr Mastura Mohd Soplan is from the Department of Clinical Medicine, Pusat Kanser Tun Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Universiti Sains Malaysia. Comments: letters@thesundaily.com

Silent killer in plain sight

IT is the body's largest artery — the main highway carrying blood from the heart — yet few Malaysians understand the dangers when it fails.

The aorta, experts warn, can become a silent killer.

Abdominal aortic aneurysm, or AAA, is a swelling of the aorta. It often develops without symptoms, striking suddenly and with deadly consequences.

"Aortic illness is common and it is potentially life-threatening," says Associate Professor Dr Edward Choke Tieng Chek, consultant vascular surgeon at Northern Heart Hospital Penang.

"Many patients do not even know they have it until it is too late," he told the 'New Straits Times'.

Globally, there is some good news. Rates of aortic disease — and deaths from it — are declining, thanks largely to better control of smoking and blood pressure.

But Malaysia faces a more worrying reality. Smoking remains prevalent, while hypertension is often poorly controlled — key drivers of aortic disease. Among those aged 65 and above, an estimated three per cent may have an aortic aneurysm.

"That is about one in 20 people

screened," Dr Choke adds.

What alarms experts now is not just prevalence, but complexity. "We are seeing fewer simple cases and more highly complex aortic diseases that require specialised care," he says.

Without early detection, the consequences can be catastrophic. When an aortic aneurysm ruptures, half of the patients die before reaching the hospital.

Of those who make it in time, only about half survive.

"In reality, survival is around 20 per cent," he points out.

The danger is compounded by silence. Aneurysms can grow for years unnoticed, often discovered only by chance during scans for unrelated conditions.

Aortic dissections (tears in the vessel wall), however, strike abruptly — usually with severe chest pain — and demand urgent diagnosis.

Malaysia currently has no national screening programme for aortic aneurysms. In countries like the United Kingdom, men aged 65 and above are routinely screened with an ultrasound.

Dr Choke believes Malaysians should not wait. "Those aged 65 and above, especially with risk factors, should consider a simple ultrasound

Malaysia currently has no national screening programme for aortic aneurysms. In countries like the United Kingdom, men aged 65 and above are routinely screened with an ultrasound.

Associate Professor
Dr Edward Choke Tieng
Chek

scan," he says.

The test is quick, painless and can detect aneurysms before they become deadly. Younger individuals with strong risk factors — such as smoking or family history — may also need earlier screening.

According to Dr Choke, a common misconception is that aortic disease affects only men. He says that while more frequent in men, women often fare worse. "In women, aneurysms can rupture at smaller sizes, and out-



comes are poorer."

There is, however, a powerful reason for optimism. Treatment has advanced dramatically. Today, about 95 per cent of cases can be treated using minimally invasive endovascular procedures.

These involve small incisions, shorter operations and faster recovery. "Patients are often discharged within one to two days," Dr Choke says. For many, it is the difference between life and death — without the burden of major surgery.

Looking ahead, Malaysia is expected to see more specialised aortic

centres and better detection. This could reduce sudden deaths — even as more cases are identified. Ultimately, the nation's trajectory will depend on lifestyle choices.

"If smoking declines, we will see fewer cases. If it increases, the burden will rise," he says.

For now, the message is stark and simple: do not smoke, control your blood pressure, know your family history and when the time comes, get screened. Because when it comes to the aorta, what you do not know can kill — and what you catch early can save your life.



The aorta: the body's largest artery. CREDIT: AI GENERATED IMAGE

Hantavirus outbreak tests post-Covid communications playbook

JENNIFER RIGBY

A RODENT-BORNE virus with a scary name. A mid-ocean cruise ship in quarantine. Several people dead and more falling sick.

It is no wonder that an outbreak of the Andes strain of hantavirus on a luxury liner in the Atlantic has revived some Covid-era trauma and panic online.

That has presented a dilemma to health officials: how to communicate quickly and clearly about a virus which is not new and unlikely to cause a pandemic, without inadvertently fomenting fear.

Half a dozen health officials said they were trying to learn from mistakes around Covid, providing information on hantavirus with more empathy while addressing uncertainties and tackling falsehoods.

"We spend half of our time discussing how we will communicate," said Gianfranco Spiteri, emergencies lead at the EU's European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control.

During Covid, many govern-

ments were slow to react or in denial, public messaging was sometimes confusing and contradictory, restrictions and vaccine rollouts were applied differently round the world, and misinformation and politicisation proliferated.

That helped fuel modern mistrust of institutions.

For example, faith in public health institutions declined in 20 of 27 EU countries between 2020 and 2022, one study showed.

Spiteri and others at the forefront of the hantavirus response spoke about the need to balance explanations of why it is a serious global health event with reassurances that risks to the public are low and honesty over the open questions about a virus that has rarely spread among humans before.

"There are people who say we are overdoing it, and on the other extreme, that we're not doing enough," he said. "We always base our messages on the evidence we have."

From a look at social media, their efforts are still a work in

progress, with many people needlessly fretting about a return to lockdowns, social distancing and face masks.

"We have kind of lost perspective," said Gustavo Palacios, a professor at Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in the United States who is originally from Argentina and a hantavirus expert.

An outbreak can be a major public health event deserving attention and action but without becoming a pandemic, he noted.

Some posts online falsely present hantavirus as a bigger existential threat than Covid, or promote protections like the ivermectin anti-parasite drug, vitamin D and zinc without scientific evidence.

False conspiracy theories are popping up too — a side effect of the Pfizer vaccine or a hoax to boost pharmaceutical profits.

Sander van der Linden, a psychology professor at England's University of Cambridge and misinformation expert, said the public need more support in how to interpret information, including

potentially showing them conspiracy theories they may face in the event of an outbreak.

As of last Thursday, there had been three deaths from 11 reported hantavirus cases, all people who had been on board the MV *Hondius*.

Dozens of other passengers are being monitored as they return to around 20 countries.

Unlike Covid, there are established measures to control hantavirus' spread, officials said.

The strain has circulated in parts of Argentina and Chile for decades and the ship samples show no meaningful variation from that virus.

"I'm definitely seeing improvements," said Gabby Stern, former head of communications at the World Health Organisation.

"It seems like the public health community has absorbed crucial lessons, although not all of them."

WHO was quick to reassure the public, holding regular press conferences, issuing alerts and tackling misinformation in social media Q&As since the outbreak was

disclosed on May 3.

WHO chief Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus even took the unusual step of an open letter to the people of Tenerife, where the *Hondius* docked on May 10.

"But I need you to hear me clearly: this is not another Covid," he wrote. "The current public health risk from hantavirus remains low."

"One of the things this is teaching us is a lesson we should have learned from Covid: What we say is really important," said Michael Osterholm, an infectious diseases expert at the University of Minnesota.

Seeing Tedros arrive on the island with Spanish officials to help oversee the hantavirus response took Laura Millan, 40, in Tenerife, back.

"It gave me the impression that this isn't just the flu — otherwise all these people wouldn't be coming," she said, adding that overall she understood their involvement helped ensure the right measures.

The writer is from Reuters

Arafah #QuranHour 2026 perkukuh spiritual warga HRPZ II

Oleh ADILA SHARINNI WAHID

KOTA BHARU - Program Arafah #QuranHour 2026 yang dijadual berlangsung pada 26 Mei ini mampu memperkukuh kesejahteraan emosi dan spiritual dalam kalangan petugas kesihatan.

Timbalan Pengarah Pengurusan Hospital Raja Perempuan Zainab II (HRPZ II), Saharuddin Mohd Kia berkata, program pengisian rohani seperti itu perlu terus diperkasakan kerana al-Quran bukan sekadar dibaca, sebaliknya perlu dihayati dan dijadikan panduan dalam kehidupan seharian.

Menurut beliau, Surah al-Muzzammil dan Surah al-Hajj yang menjadi fokus program kali ini banyak menekankan aspek penghayatan kehidupan seorang Muslim termasuk kekuatan dalaman, pengorbanan dan ketakwaan kepada ALLAH SWT.

"Kita bukan sekadar membaca al-Quran, tetapi perlu memahami, mentadabbur dan menghayati ibrah pada setiap ayat yang disampaikan.

"Dalam kehidupan hari ini, masyarakat berdepan pelbagai cabaran dan tekanan. Sebab itu, kekuatan dalaman amat diperlukan supaya kehidupan sentiasa berada di landasan yang betul berpandukan al-Quran dan sunnah," katanya.

Beliau berkata demikian ketika ditemui

semasa program jelajah kempen Arafah #QuranHour 2026 anjuran Persatuan Rumah Ngaji Negeri Kelantan (PRNNK) di HRPZ II di sini pada Ahad.

Program bertemakan 'Ummah Berbudhi dan Penyayang, Satu Kebangkitan' itu berlangsung serentak di seluruh negara dengan lokasi utama di Kelantan diadakan di Masjid An-Nur Kota Kubang Labu di sini.

Menurut beliau, pihak pengurusan HRPZ II sentiasa menggalakkan program berbentuk pengisian spiritual bagi membantu membina kekuatan emosi dalam kalangan warga kerja hospital.

Katanya, petugas kesihatan bukan sahaja memerlukan kekuatan fizikal ketika menjalankan tugas, malah perlu mempunyai ketahanan spiritual terutama ketika berhadapan dengan pesakit daripada pelbagai latar belakang dan situasi.

"Sebelum kita merawat pesakit, kita sendiri perlu mempunyai kekuatan emosi dan spiritual.

"Pesakit yang datang ke hospital bukan hanya menanggung kesakitan fizikal tetapi turut berdepan tekanan emosi dan masalah kehidupan. Jadi, kita perlu membantu dan

Bina kekuatan emosi petugas kesihatan



Saharuddin (tengah) bersama wakil PRNNK menunjukkan risalah Arafah #QuranHour 2026.

mengawal emosi mereka," katanya.

Mengulas lanjut, beliau berkata, penghimpunan umat Islam di Arafah ketika musim haji turut membawa mesej besar mengenai kesamarataan manusia di sisi ALLAH SWT.

"Arafah memberi manifestasi bahawa manusia ini sebenarnya sama sahaja, yang membezakan hanyalah ketakwaan kepada ALLAH SWT.

"Sebab itu, dalam kehidupan kita perlu sentiasa bersangka baik, hidup berlandaskan ajaran Islam dan sanggup berkorban demi memberi manfaat kepada masyarakat," katanya.

Beliau turut menyifatkan kisah pengorbanan Nabi Ibrahim AS dan ketaatan Nabi Ismail AS sebagai simbol penting pengorbanan serta keikhlasan yang perlu diterapkan dalam kehidupan umat Islam hari ini.

Sehubungan itu, beliau berkata, pihak hospital menyokong penuh pelaksanaan program Arafah #QuranHour sebagai usaha memperkukuh penghayatan al-Quran serta membina masyarakat yang lebih seimbang dari sudut rohani dan emosi.

Malaysia kekal jadi destinasi utama pelancongan perubatan

Bukti masyarakat antarabangsa yakin kualiti sistem kesihatan negara, tawar harga berpatutan

Oleh Audrey Dermawan
audreymd@bh.com.my

Georgetown: Industri pelancongan perubatan Malaysia terus berkembang, mencerminkan keyakinan berterusan masyarakat antarabangsa terhadap sistem kesihatan negara yang berkualiti tinggi dan berpatutan.

Perkembangan itu berlaku meskipun pelaksanaan Cukai Jualan dan Perkhidmatan (SST) sebanyak enam peratus dikenakan ke atas perkhidmatan penjagaan kesihatan terpilih.

Menteri Kewangan II, Datuk Seri Amir Hamzah Azizan, berkata Malaysia kekal menjadi destinasi pilihan pesakit asing yang mendapatkan rawatan perubatan berkualiti pada kos kompetitif, dengan permintaan terus me-

ingkat di hab penjagaan kesihatan utama seluruh negara.

Beliau berkata, hospital di Pulau Pinang, Johor dan Lembah Klang terus merekodkan peningkatan jumlah pesakit antarabangsa, sekali gus membuktikan daya tahan ekosistem pelancongan perubatan negara.

"Jika anda berkunjung ke hospital swasta di Pulau Pinang, sebahagian besar pesakitnya adalah dari luar negara kerana Malaysia masih menawarkan perkhidmatan penjagaan kesihatan berkualiti dan pada harga berpatutan.

"Jika anda mengunjungi hospital di Johor atau Lembah Klang, anda juga akan melihat peningkatan permintaan daripada pelancong asing yang datang ke sini bagi mendapatkan rawatan perubatan," katanya selepas mengadakan lawatan ke Intel di sini, semalam.

Terdahulu, beliau melawat jajaran projek Transit Aliran Ringan (LRT) Laluan Mutiara dan projek Silicon Island.

Amir Hamzah berkata, Malaysia antara lain muncul sebagai antara destinasi utama pelancongan perubatan di rantau ini, didorong prestasi hospital swasta yang diiktiraf pada peringkat antarabangsa, tenaga profesional



Amir Hamzah pada sidang media selepas mengadakan lawatan ke Intel di Georgetown, semalam. (Foto BERNAMA)

kesihatan berkemahiran tinggi serta kos rawatan lebih rendah berbanding negara lain.

Beliau menyifatkan pelancongan perubatan sebagai sektor pertumbuhan strategik yang perlu terus disokong berikutan kesan limpahan ekonomi yang meluas, termasuk penciptaan peluang pekerjaan, peningkatan permintaan sektor hospitaliti dan pelaburan penjagaan kesihatan.

"Saya fikir ini sektor yang sedang berkembang dan perlu terus

kita sokong," katanya.

Kukuh kemampanan fiskal

Mengulas lanjut, beliau berkata, kerajaan memperkenalkan SST sebagai sebahagian usaha lebih luas bagi mengukuhkan kemampanan fiskal dan memperluas sumber hasil negara tanpa membebankan rakyat berlebihan.

Rangka kerja cukai itu, katanya, dirangka dengan teliti menerusi pengecualian dan langkah bersasar bagi meminimumkan kesan terhadap rakyat, sambil

mengekalkan daya saing sektor utama, termasuk penjagaan kesihatan dan pelancongan perubatan.

"SST dilaksanakan untuk meningkatkan kutipan hasil kerajaan dan menambah ruang fiskal negara yang menjadi keutamaan sejak beberapa tahun lalu.

"Namun, lebih penting dalam pelaksanaan SST ialah kita memastikan ia tidak memberi kesan negatif kepada rakyat yang memerlukan sokongan. Sebab ini pengecualian dan pengasingan tertentu diperkenalkan," katanya.

Mengenai hasil kutipan SST, Amir Hamzah berkata, ia disalurkan ke kumpulan disatukan dan digunakan bagi membiayai keseluruhan perbelanjaan fiskal serta keutamaan pembangunan negara.

Beliau berkata, hanya levi tertentu seperti cukai gula yang diperuntukkan khusus untuk intervensi kesihatan bersasar.

"Bagi kutipan SST, hasilnya dimasukkan ke dalam kumpulan wang disatukan dan digunakan bagi menyokong perbelanjaan fiskal kerajaan.

"Kita hanya membuat pengasingan khusus dalam beberapa perkara seperti cukai gula digunakan untuk intervensi berkaitan penyakit seperti diabetes dan buah pinggang," katanya.

Malaysia hilang hasil RM11.5b akibat jualan rokok haram sejak 2 tahun lalu

Malaysia dianggarkan kehilangan hasil kerajaan sebanyak RM11.5 bilion (AS\$2.5 bilion) akibat perdagangan tembakau haram sepanjang dua tahun lalu, iaitu kerugian kedua tertinggi dalam kalangan ASEAN-6, menurut laporan yang dikeluarkan hari ini oleh EU-ASEAN Business Council (EU-ABC) dan Euromonitor International.

Dapatan laporan itu menunjukkan Malaysia merekodkan bahagian pasaran rokok haram tertinggi dalam ASEAN-6, dengan 57 peratus rokok yang dijual pada 2025 dianggarkan adalah haram - menjadikannya satu-satunya pasaran yang dinilai di rantau ini di mana jualan rokok haram melebihi jualan sah.

Laporan itu menekankan pertumbuhan ketara pasaran tembakau haram di rantau ini, dengan pengendali perdagangan haram terus mencatat keuntungan yang meningkat dari tahun ke tahun, sekali gus menafikan kerajaan hasil cukai yang amat diperlukan serta mengalihkan permintaan daripada perniagaan sah.

Situasi ini berlaku ketika

Asia Tenggara berdepan kejutan ekonomi dan rantaian bekalan susulan krisis Asia Barat, yang memberi tekanan besar terhadap belanjawan kerajaan dan meningkatkan penelitian awam, sekali gus menimbulkan kebimbangan terhadap daya tahan ekonomi rantau ini.

Dalam konteks itu, laporan berkenaan menyifatkan perdagangan haram sebagai risiko strategik kepada cita-cita pertumbuhan ASEAN.

Antara penemuan utama laporan itu ialah Indonesia mencatat kehilangan hasil kerajaan tertinggi dalam ASEAN-6 sebanyak AS\$5.6 bilion, diikuti Malaysia dan Filipina masing-masing sebanyak AS\$2.5 bilion.

Secara keseluruhan, perdagangan tembakau haram menyebabkan kehilangan hasil kerajaan sebanyak AS\$13.1 bilion di seluruh ASEAN-6 sepanjang dua tahun lalu.

Pasaran tembakau haram di ASEAN-6 menjana anggaran hasil sebanyak AS\$12.6 bilion sepanjang tempoh 2024 hingga 2025, dengan jualan rokok haram meningkat

14 peratus dan jualan vape haram meningkat 24 peratus dalam setahun lalu sahaja.

Pasaran vape haram Malaysia menjana anggaran RM1.7 bilion (AS\$365 juta) pada 2025 - tertinggi dalam ASEAN-6 - dengan vape haram merangkumi 67 peratus daripada jumlah vape yang dijual.

Pemintaan terhadap tembakau haram dipacu oleh harga yang lebih murah dan akses yang semakin mudah kepada produk haram, manakala bekalan pula dipermudah oleh laluan perdagangan ASEAN yang luas dan saling berhubung serta kawalan rantaian bekalan yang tidak sekata, sekali gus menyukarkan penguatkuasaan kastam.

Rokok dan vape haram sebahagian besarnya dihasilkan di rantau ini, khususnya di Indonesia dan Kemboja, selain bekalan tambahan dari China, manakala Malaysia, Singapura dan Vietnam menjadi hab pengedaran utama.

Penemuan ini hanya mewakili sebahagian kecil daripada cabaran perdagangan haram yang lebih luas di rantau ini.

Laporan terdahulu oleh EU-

ABC menganggarkan nilai keseluruhan pasaran perdagangan haram ASEAN mencecah AS\$35 bilion.

"Skala perdagangan haram di seluruh ASEAN sering dipandang rendah - dan lebih membimbangkan, ia berkembang pada kadar yang amat membimbangkan. Kesannya sangat meluas, merangkumi cabaran ekonomi, kesihatan awam dan keselamatan. Jika tidak dibendung, perdagangan haram boleh menjejaskan masa depan ekonomi ASEAN sebagai enjin pertumbuhan global," kata Pengarah Eksekutif EU-ABC, Chris Humphrey.

Laporan itu menyatakan bahawa rokok dan vape haram membentuk sebahagian besar daripada perdagangan tembakau haram di Asia Tenggara.

Walaupun pertumbuhan rokok haram dijangka menurun dalam tempoh tiga tahun akan datang, vape haram dijangka berkembang lebih pantas pada kadar hampir sembilan peratus setiap tahun, meningkat daripada sekitar tujuh peratus pada tahun-tahun sebelumnya.

Seramai 214 remaja dikompaun hisap vape

Pasir Mas: Trend penggunaan vape dalam kalangan remaja di Kelantan kini berada pada tahap membimbangkan apabila seramai 214 individu dikompaun dalam operasi penguatkuasaan yang dijalankan baru-baru ini.

Pengarah Jabatan Kesihatan Negeri Kelantan (JKNK) Datuk Dr Mohd Azman Yacob berkata, jumlah berkeunaan adalah rekod kedua tertinggi membabitkan kesalahan Orang Belum Dewasa (OBD) Merokok di kawasan larangan merokok di bawah Seksyen 17(1) bagi tempoh Januari hingga April tahun ini.

Katanya, kebanyakan mereka yang dikenakan kompaun itu berusia di antara 15 hingga 16 tahun dan didapati melakukan kesalahan di tempat awam se-

perti kafe, kedai makan serta perhentian bas.

"Kebimbangan utama ketika ini ialah kemudahan akses golongan muda terhadap produk vape yang semakin mudah diperolehi termasuk melalui premis yang bersembunyi di sebalik perniagaan lain selain platform dalam talian menjadi cabaran besar kepada pihak berkuasa untuk menanganinya perkara ini.

"Malah, pelbagai bentuk dan reka bentuk vape yang dipromosikan di media sosial termasuk menyerupai

permainan menarik perhatian golongan remaja.

"Pihak berkuasa tempatan (PBT) di Kelantan tidak mengeluarkan lesen khusus bagi penjualan vape kerana produk berkenaan diharamkan di negeri ini. Namun, terdapat premis

yang dipercayai berselindung di sebalik perniagaan lain untuk menjual rokok elektronik ini," katanya.

Dr Mohd Azman berkata, pelbagai pendekatan perlu dilakukan bagi meningkatkan kesedaran dalam kalangan remaja mengenai bahaya vape termasuk melalui institusi pendidikan dan masjid.

"Kita tidak boleh buat penguatkuasaan 24 jam kerana mereka boleh menyorok dan menghisap di tempat tertentu dan disebabkan itu kesedaran adalah perkara paling penting.

"Usaha bersepadu membabitkan Kementerian Kesihatan Malaysia (KKM), Kementerian Pendidikan Tinggi (KPT) serta Jabatan Pendidikan Negeri (JPN) Kelantan akan diperkuatkan bagi melaksanakan bengkel, kempen dan program kesedaran," katanya.

Katanya, penerangan semata-mata berkenaan kesan buruk vape mungkin tidak mencukupi untuk mengubah tingkah laku golongan muda, sebaliknya pendekatan berasaskan *behavior science* atau sains tingkah laku perlu diterapkan.

