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Curbing dadah abuse in nightspots (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - Nightspot owners and managers whose premises are used to peddle dadah are liable to be charged with trafficking while users of Ecstasy pills will be whipped under separate amendments to the Dangerous Drug Act 1952 and Poisons Act 1952, respectively.

This was disclosed today by Deputy Home Minister Datuk Seri Megat Junid Megat Ayub and Health Minister Datuk Chua Jui Meng.

The amendment to the DDA will be tabled at next month's Parliament sitting while the Health Ministry is expected to submit its recommendations to amend the Poisons Act to the Cabinet within three months.

In Teluk Intan, Megat Junid said nightspot owners would be charged with trafficking if patrons were caught with dadah on their premises.

"We do not want traffickers to use these outlets to distribute dadah like Ecstasy pills.

"There is no clause under the DDA to charge those found collaborating with traffickers," Megat Junid told reporters after the breaking of fast at Masjid Kampung Bukit Chawi, near here, last night.

He was commenting on a report by the police's Narcotics Department that more than 20 nightspots in Kuala Lumpur had been used by the patrons to traffic in Ecstasy pills and indulge in dadah abuse.

Last week, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad warned that nightspot owners would be regarded as collaborators in dadah trafficking if they did not make any effort to stop dadah from being sold on their premises.

Megat Junid said most nightspot owners and managers were aware of the use of dadah on their premises but chose to ignore the problem.

During several raids at nightspots in the Klang Valley in recent months, police had to leave without apprehending the traffickers as they would throw the psychotropic pills on the floor.

By doing so, the traffickers avoided being charged with possession of the drug under section 39B of the DDA which carries the mandatory death sentence.

On some 20,000 foreigners reportedly just waiting to slip into the country along the Malaysian-Thai border in Kelantan, Megat Junid said the authorities were ready for them.

"We won't be complacent during the festive season," he said, adding the army and police would step up surveillance along the Malaysian-Thai border.

He added that the authorities would maintain the pressure on the estimated one million illegal immigrants who had ignored two amnesties offered by the Government.

(The Government had initially given the foreigners up to Dec 31, 1996, to register with the Task Force on Foreign Workers. However, fewer than 500,000 responded, prompting the Government to offer a second amnesty, which expired on Saturday, whereby they are allowed to leave the country without being prosecuted subject to certain conditions).

Megat Junid said: "The operations will be conducted day and night. We will make house calls and check nightspots to weed out these aliens."

The Government believes Malaysians, including companies, will no longer risk employing illegal immigrants following the introduction of stiffer penalties such as mandatory jail sentence and whipping.

In Muar, Chua said there was a wide gap between the DDA and the Poisons Act in so far as penalties were concerned for dadah abuse.

"Currently, the maximum penalty for cases involving ephedrine, which is the main component in Ecstasy pills, is a fine of RM5,000 or imprisonment up to two years, or both."

Chua said the ministry was proposing to introduce stiffer penalties, including whipping for dadah abusers especially those taking Ecstasy pills.

Ephedrine is a controlled item and is listed as a poison under the Poisons List Order 1993.

"The adverse effects of ephedrine include giddiness, headache, nausea, vomiting, sweating, palpitations, restlessness and insomnia, with large doses causing paranoid psychosis, delusion and hallucinations.

"Ecstasy pills are not registered with the Drug Control Authority, and in all cases where the pills are abused, it has been found that they are from an illegal source," Chua said.

He was speaking to reporters after presenting 53 packets of goodies valued at RM4,000, to the needy at the Bakri MCA service centre and the MCA Bakri new village.

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