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Abdullah launches 'Tak nak' anti-smoking drive

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PUTRAJAYA, Mon. - If you smoke, stop; if you don't, don't start. That, in a nutshell, was the Prime Minister's message at the launch of the national "Tak nak" anti-smoking campaign at the Convention Centre here today, principally directed at youth.

Calling for greater enforcement against the sale of cigarettes to those under 18, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said the Government was determined to encourage smokers to kick the habit and prevent others, especially the young, from picking it up.

Abdullah said the five-year, RM100-million campaign would extend into every school in the country.

"The focus and message is for every stratum of society, but pupils are the most important target because it is easier to mould them from a tender age to say 'no' to smoking."

"We don't want them to smoke. That is important."

Abdullah said anti-smoking campaigns had to be implemented in a consistent and concerted manner to yield positive results.

Present at the event was Health Minister Datuk Chua Jui Meng, who noted that current legislation allowed the authorities to compound those below 18 found smoking in public, and possessing or purchasing cigarettes.

Under the Control of Tobacco Products Regulations 1993 (Amendment 1997), it is an offence for anyone under 18 to buy cigarettes or indulge in smoking. Those found smoking or chewing tobacco, or in possession of cigarettes in a public or private place, face fines of not more than RM1,000.

Retailers who sell cigarettes to minors are also liable to fines not exceeding RM5,000 or jail terms not exceeding two years.

Chua stressed, however, that the anti-smoking campaign launched today was more a persuasive than punitive approach to the problem.

"The aim of the campaign is to discourage smoking through awareness based on scientific findings," he said.

"Our slogan is also catchy and is aimed primarily at the younger generation."

In his speech, the Prime Minister told the thousands of pupils present that it did not pay to pick up the smoking habit, which was detrimental to healthy living.

"I never smoked during my younger days and I have stayed a non-smoker. Our former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad is also a non-smoker. I'm not saying that only non-smokers can become Prime Ministers, but you must be a healthy person," Abdullah said, drawing laughter and loud applause.

"We don't want our children to grow up to be smokers," he said, noting that smoking had been shown to cause a host of debilitating ailments.

"Take care of your health and don't be easily influenced by your friends or anyone who smokes. You must have the courage to say 'No' to smoking because it is the right thing to do.

"Adults, particularly parents, must also set a good example by stopping smoking or not smoking in the presence of children," Abdullah said.

He said continuous anti-smoking campaigns would help ensure that Malaysia by 2020 would not just be fully developed but would also have a healthy population.