

Legalising marijuana detrimental to Malaysians, says Dr Siti Hasmah

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The govt should also accelerate the introduction of comprehensive sex education in schools, says the PM's wife

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THE government should refrain from pursuing the proposal to legalise the usage of cannabis in the country, as such a move could have adverse impact to the people in general, said Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali.

The wife of Prime Minister (PM) Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said allowing cannabis — also known as marijuana or ganja — in the medical field can increase social issues among Malaysians.

"I guess there are some good medical benefits, but I don't support calls to legalise it," she told *The Malaysian*

Reserve during an exclusive interview in Putrajaya.

Dr Siti Hasmah — who championed anti-smoking and anti-drug abuse campaigns since 1985, during her first stint as the PM's wife — said the proposal to allow marijuana in the medical field disturbs her.

"I get worried when some say that we should legalise marijuana. I guess the intention was good, but the consequence could be alarming.

"I've been fighting all my life, since 1985, trying to persuade parents to look after their children, to talk to them and say don't smoke because that would lead to something bad, especially smoking marijuana," she added.

Deputy Health Minister Dr Lee Boon Chye earlier this week said the government will consider marijuana for medical purposes if pharmaceutical companies can prove the drug's efficacy and that it is safe for use.

"Whether it comes in the form of tablets or oil, they (pharmaceutical

firms) must specify its usage, including the dosage," he had said.

Lee added that the ministry has yet to issue a licence to any individual or company to use marijuana as medicine to date.

The cultivation of marijuana or its usage for medicinal purposes is currently prohibited under the Dangerous Drugs Act 1952 (DDA).

It is classified as a chemical under the DDA and possession or sale of the drug is illegal.

The possession, use and sale of cannabis are also illegal in most countries of the world.

Medical cannabis refers to the physician-recommended use of cannabis, which is allowed in Canada, Belgium, Australia, the Netherlands, Germany, Spain and the majority of the US.

In September 2018, cannabis was legalised in South Africa, while Canada legalised recreational use of cannabis in October 2018.

Meanwhile, Dr Siti Hasmah said the

government should also accelerate the introduction of comprehensive sex education in schools to control the rise in child rapes and underage marriages and mothers in the country.

Acknowledging that "sex" is still a taboo word in most Malaysian households, Dr Siti Hasmah said sex education is vital to teach young children good values and how priceless their bodies are.

"I know the public does not like the word 'sex'. Sex education is important, but okay, if you don't like it, name it health education instead.

"I feel if I were to talk to the younger ones; the adolescents for example, I will talk to them about how precious their bodies are and how precious (a gift) God has given them.

"I would talk to them about how beautiful their bodies are; so don't abuse it and don't let people abuse it. Maybe they can understand," she said.

Statistics have revealed that around 14 out of every 1,000 underage girls

in Malaysia fall pregnant every year, which adds up to an average of 18,000 girls per year.

In comparison, Singapore's rate is four pregnancies for every 1,000 underage girls, and Hong Kong is at three out of every 1,000.

A survey supported by the Health Ministry in 2015 also revealed the lack of sexual health knowledge among Malaysians, where 35% of Malaysian female youths believe that having sex for the first time does not lead to a pregnancy, and one in five Malaysians believe that sexually-transmitted infections could be transmitted by mosquitoes.

Media reports highlighted that the National Registration Department found 4,992 illegitimate children born to girls aged 18 and below in 2017.

There were also 120 reported cases of baby dumping in the same year.

As of June this year, 1,664 illegitimate children were born to underage mothers.