

## **Asean does not want tobacco on Afta list**

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PETALING JAYA: Asean countries have decided that they do not want tobacco to be in the Asean Free Trade Agreement (Afta) list, said Health Minister Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai.

Liow said that the decision was made during the Asean Health Ministers Meeting in Thailand last week as part of efforts to fight against non-communicable diseases.

"We have discussed how to fight non-communicable diseases and one way was to reduce tobacco use and stop tobacco from reigning in Asean.

"We appeal to all negotiators not to put tobacco in the Afta list," he said after opening the Malaysian Dietitians' Association Scientific Conference and 18th annual general meeting yesterday.

Under the Afta agreement which comes into force in 2015, tariffs of goods would be reduced to below 5%.

Liow also said the ministers agreed to beef up efforts against communicable diseases.

Malaysia, he said, had been given the task to set up the Asean Risk Communication Centre to train more people in the area of communicable diseases communication, surveillance and cooperation among Asean countries.

The centre would be set up by the end of the year and Malaysia's training module would be shared with other countries, he added.

Asked to comment on reports that health officials had detected the presence of a virus that caused the hand, foot and mouth disease in the unexplained outbreak that killed more than 50 Cambodian children recently, Liow said that it was still not confirmed.

"We are also checking on the disease," he said, adding that the ministry had been monitoring the situation at the airports.

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