

Previously used against watches and now sex toys: Lawyers explain the breadth of Malaysia's printing laws



Home Ministry enforcement and control division secretary Nik Yusaimi Yussof said the latest raid in Masai, Johor had revealed that the sex toys were being sold openly to the public. — Picture by Ben Tan

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By Syed Jaymal Zahiid

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KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 29 — The government's use of a law governing print and publication to arrest "illegal" sex toy sellers may be a recent trend but is not out of the

ordinary, lawyers said after several recent raids by the Home Ministry (KDN) that led to the seizure of such products raised questions about the law's application in this area.

Datuk Geethan Ram Vincent, a lawyer experienced in handling cases involving the Printing Presses and Publications Act (PPPA) 1984, said the Act generally regulates the printing, importation, production, reproduction and distribution of "publications" — which he said are broadly defined as all written or printed matter, in any "form, shape or in any manner is capable of suggesting words or ideas."

"This wide definition may also include sex toys, whereby the production and distribution are governed by the PPPA," he told *Malay Mail*.

"Specifically, sales of sex toys are prohibited under Section 7(1) of the PPPA for eroding moral values. This Section grants the Ministry 'absolute power' to ban the printing, importation, production, reproduction, publishing, sale, issue, circulation, distribution, or possession of that publication, in this case the sex toy."

Handling "undesirable publications", Section 7(1) empowers the home minister to use his discretion to gazette a ban against "any article, caricature, photograph, report, notes, writing, sound, music, statement or any other thing" which is deemed "prejudicial to public order, morality, security, or which is likely to alarm public opinion".

[Earlier this month](#), Home Ministry enforcement officers confiscated over 2,295 sex toys with an estimated value of RM70,000 in raids conducted in Johor, Penang and Sarawak, arresting several people in a case that drew public interest.

KDN said the matter would be investigated under Section 292 of the Penal Code that handles "sales of obscene books, et cetera" as well as Section 7(1) of the PPPA, with the ministry's enforcement and control division secretary Nik Yusaimi Yussof saying enforcement officers raided premises suspected of selling sex toys openly to the public in three states as part of a crackdown on the sale of sex toys.

In the most recent raid in Johor, Nik Yusaimi said ministry officers found that sex toys were sold alongside other products like cosmetics, health and tourism-related paraphernalia. These sex toys were also sold online, he was reported saying.

Nik Yusaimi also said the other recent raids involved a raid on a shop inside a shopping centre in Kuching, Sarawak in January this year where 135 units of sex toys with an estimated value of RM10,890.50 were seized.

He added two other raids were carried out in shopping centres in Bayan Lepas, Penang and Ipoh, Perak last month where the ministry recorded seizures of 102 units (RM15,372) and 46 units (RM6,050) respectively.



Watches are displayed for sale at a Swatch store at Setia City Mall in Shah Alam May 25, 2023. — Picture by Yusof Mat Isa

Whether or not sex toy sales are generally banned or some exceptions — such as licensed selling — are allowed is unclear. Nizam argued criminalising sex toys across the board may not be the right legislative policy to adopt.

“Occasionally, sex toy use is supported on medical grounds. Consequently, on such an occasion, the phrase ‘sex toys’ may be a misnomer and the term ‘medical device’ would be more apt,” he said.

“For example, ‘sex toys’ can be used to help treat the symptoms of disorders such as erectile dysfunction, pelvic floor dysfunction, genital arousal disorder, hypoactive sexual disorder, and orgasm disorder.”

The lawyer believed the question as to why sex toys are considered a problem that requires regulation may be tied to the taboo around masturbation. Despite experts’ views that masturbation is biologically normal and safe, religious conservatives often portray it as immoral.

“The question as to why sex toys are considered a problem requiring regulation may be down to the thinking that masturbation is a sin and causes health issues,” Nizam said.

Geethan suggested that a ban on sex toys may have to do more with “norms” than science, and unless Malaysian society normalises frank discussions about sex laws that govern sex-related products are unlikely to change.

“For conservative societies like Malaysia, where such items are viewed as taboo due to prevailing cultural norms, the legality of sex toys remains restricted,” he said.

“Despite arguments for their private and intimate use, until societal perception towards sexual activities, including the use of sex toys evolve, it’s less likely for the Ministry’s stance to change.”

The Home Ministry’s enforcement and control division reportedly said it had seized various types of sex toys which were worth a total of RM1.3 million last year.

This comes as online shopping platform Shopee also updated [its guidelines](#) in January this year to now prohibit the sales of "obscene and adult related products", which it said include sex toys, sex dolls, pornography and adult video games.