

Go tougher on online drug trade, govt urged



PETALING JAYA: Stricter enforcement is needed to curb the menace of online drug dealing, say stakeholders.

Rumah Pengasih Selangor chairman Jaafar Daud said there had been instances where drugs such as weed and methamphethamine – also known by its street names ice, batu and yaba – were traded using delivery services with the option of cash on delivery too.

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He said this became more prevalent during the days of the movement control orders enforced from 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

“They didn’t have to leave their homes as the (drugs) were delivered to them,” he said when contacted.

Jaafar said drug dealers were becoming more “advanced with the authorities having a hard time coping with their modus operandi”.

“They need time to figure out the latest methods (used in drug dealing),” he said, pointing out that online drug dealing had become a lucrative business.

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Jaafar called for a review of existing laws to make them more community friendly, suggesting that the government work with civil society groups on decriminalising drug abuse and looking for alternative penalties instead of jail terms for drug addicts.

Consumers’ Association of Penang senior education officer NV Subbarow lamented that not much was being done to counter the online sale of substances such as vape.

He suggested that the proposed E-Commerce Platform Supervision Bill also cover logistics. “All deliveries must be checked for safety purposes. The law must include this aspect. This will tighten things so that no illicit substance can move around easily.

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“The company that distributes the illicit substance must also be held responsible. They must know what they are delivering to customers,” he said.

Lawyer Datuk Geethan Ram Vincent said investigation and enforcement need to adapt to the sale of drugs online. “At the end of the day, irrespective of how the drugs are being sold or supplied, it comes down to the offence of selling, buying, possessing, using and trafficking, which the existing laws already cover.

“It is the areas of online sales and advertising that need to be addressed,” he said when asked on what the proposed Bill should encompass.

He said provisions making it an offence to advertise, promote or sell any kind of drugs online must be introduced.

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“That aside, the platforms that allow such advertising, promotion and sale must also be held liable. New provisions in this regard must be introduced,” Geethan added.

Lawyer Kitson Foong said the current drug laws in the country do not discriminate between online and offline transactions. He said transactions online or offline involving illicit drugs was an offence under the Dangerous Drugs Act 1952. "The emphasis of our current drug laws – which require the prosecution to prove physical possession – however, poses limitations to enforcement.

"This is especially so when it comes to individuals who clearly participate in online drug dealing but do not have the offending drugs in their physical possession when arrested," he said.

He said Singapore enacted the Online Criminal Harms Act 2023, through which the authorities were given wide powers to issue directives to internet service providers to detect, intercept or remove suspicious online activities associated with crime.