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## Curbing smoking cut drug addiction too

### CIGARETTES

# Curbing smoking will cut drug addiction too

A NUMBER of letters have been published urging our government not to give in to the request to reintroduce kiddie cigarette packs. I am writing to state the same.

We were recently shocked by the tragic news of 23 people who died in a religious school fire.

Then came the discovery that the cause of the fire was an act of arson by seven young boys, who tested positive for drugs. Drug addiction seems to be increasing in our country.

I believe the reason we have not been able to tackle the issue is because we have not worked hard enough to stop the smoking habit. Smoking is the gateway to drug addiction. Various studies have confirmed this.

In a lecture I attended years ago, we were told that a drug lord in Myanmar had prevented his children and followers from smoking.

When one smokes, one can easily fall prey to drug pushers who are all out to recruit new addicts.

Children who smoke will be easy targets as they will not refuse any cigarette offered to them and they may unknowingly accept a drug-laced cigarette, and eventually will be hooked on drugs.

I certainly will not be surprised if the seven boys allegedly involved in the arson are smokers, too.

I once had a good, hardworking and responsible doctor under my wing when I was managing a hospital.

However, over a few years, his character and behaviour changed. He was absent from work, and could not be contacted most of the time.

He was a smoker and we discovered later that he had become a drug addict. Counselling did not work and we had to terminate his services. It was indeed sad to see an exemplary doctor face a ruined future because of drug abuse.

I believe that he was a victim

of drug-laced cigarettes.

We must do all we can to curb smoking and, God willing, we will see a decline in drug addiction, too.

There are steps we can adopt to stop this menace:

**BAN** kiddie cigarette packs for good;

**PARENTS** need to monitor their children's activities and also the friends they mix with. They should not be too generous with pocket money;

**IF** we see children smoking, we should talk them out of it by telling them the hazards of smoking and guiding them on how to quit the habit;

**I URGE** all *imam* and *ustaz* to reach out to youngsters in the streets and neighbourhood;

**TEACHERS** need to send students who smoke for counselling. Do not resort to punishment. Schools should make zero smokers one of their performance indicators;

**CLAMP** down hard on the sale of illicit and kiddie cigarette packs;

**MAKE** it a law that no shops in the vicinity of schools sell cigarettes; and,

**REVIVE** the smoke-free programmes initiated in several states six years ago to protect non-smokers from second- and third-hand cigarette smoke.

Of the top eight leading causes of death in the world, six are related to tobacco addiction. It is therefore sinful if we do not do anything to stop children from smoking.

When they start young, it takes a greater toll on their health. If these young smokers go on to become drug addicts, the economic and social costs to our country will be enormous.

I urge the government to ban the sale of kiddie packs if we are serious about meeting the target of being a developed nation.

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