

## Preparing for the endgame

In conjunction with World No Tobacco Day on Tuesday, we take a look at the proposed generational tobacco ban and the preparations needed to achieve its aim.

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IN an ideal world, there would be no smokers, cigarettes or addicts of any kind, eliminating much of the suffering these can cause.

The reality: tobacco kills up to half of its users and is a significant health burden worldwide.

Since 1990, the frequency of smoking has decreased steadily around the globe, especially in high-income countries.

However, the pace of this decline is not equal across the world.

The burden of tobacco smoking is being increasingly borne by low- and middle-income countries.

Over 80% of the 1.3 billion tobacco users worldwide live in such countries, with China being both the world's largest producer and consumer of tobacco.

In many households, tobacco use contributes to poverty by diverting household

spending from basic needs such as food and shelter, to tobacco.

Ending the global tobacco epidemic continues to be a challenge as current measures to deter smoking, no matter how well thought of, have not been able to change the global statistics much.

In 2004, the national assembly of Bhutan (which was then an absolute monarchy) banned the sale of tobacco throughout the country, as well as smoking in public places, private offices, and even recreation centres like bars and pubs, in a radical move.

The Himalayan nation was lauded for being the first country in the world to go entirely smoke-free.

However, threatened by the risk of Covid-19 spread due to the continuous smuggling of tobacco products through Bhutan's porous southern border during the early part of the pandemic, the government amended the bill to lift the ban last December.

Hence, selling, buying, possession, distribution and transportation of tobacco and tobacco products in the country will be legalised

once again if the bill is endorsed.

Meanwhile, in a move to crack down on smoking and eventually phase it out, New Zealand intends to ban the sale of tobacco to its next generation.

Under this "endgame", anyone born after 2008 will not be able to buy cigarettes or tobacco products during their lifetime, as stipulated in a bill to be tabled in New Zealand's parliament next month.

Only older generations will be able to buy tobacco products under the "world-leading plans".

Even then, the products will only be allowed to contain low levels of nicotine.

Malaysia is taking a similar stance.

Health Minister Khairy Jamaluddin is expected to table the much-talked-about new Tobacco and Smoking Control Act in Parliament in July.

In a move called the Generational Endgame (GEG), this Act will ban the smoking and possession of tobacco products, including vape, to the generations born after 2005.

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