

## Soda tax not the answer to reducing sugar intake, opines lecturer

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MIRI: The proposed soda tax will not be effective in reducing the intake of sugar though it is intended to rein in the Malaysian habit of consuming the sweet substance which has caused a high rate of diabetes in the country.

According to Business and Management College lecturer Karambir Singh, the soda tax will not meet its objective much like the sin tax on tobacco products which has failed to stop the smoking habit.

"If the intention is genuinely because of concern for peoples' health, the government should completely ban soda drinks and cigarettes in Malaysia," he said.



Karambir Singh

He was commenting on the soda tax proposed by Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad to encourage healthy living by reducing sugar consumption, which is a cause of diabetes.

The prime minister floated the idea at the launching of the Cities 4.0 + Business 4.0 Conference and Exhibition in Kuala Lumpur on Monday.

He was answering a question on the government's stand on the soda tax to increase government revenue.

Kuala Lumpur-based The Galen Centre for Health and Social Policy has advised the government to be cautious about its soda tax proposal, saying studies show its long-term effectiveness in reducing obesity is mixed.

The research body's CEO Azrul Mohd Khalib was quoted in a news portal as saying that lower-income households will also be hit by the tax as they spend a significant proportion of their income on soda as a source of cheap energy and treats.

Studies and the experience from countries which have already implemented this measure, such as Chile, Mexico and the United Kingdom, have indicated that such tax will have both short-term and long-term effects.

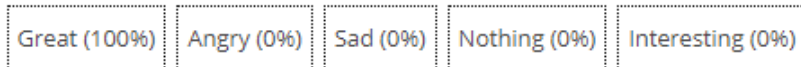
This study found that in the short-term, young consumers aged 13 to 30 years across different socio-economic backgrounds would likely reduce their sugar consumption by up to 80 per cent compared to the average consumer, turning to beverages which are less sweet but older individuals and those who already have high-sugar diets are unlikely to change habits despite the price increases.

In the long term, the situation will normalise and consumers may very well end up buying the same amount of soda drinks but paying more.

Azrul suggested that such tax be applied to manufacturers as in the UK as push factor to reduce the sugar content in their products to avoid being taxed.

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