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'Mr Death' clouds KL tobacco convention Claudia Theophilus Nov 15, 05 7:41pm

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Two teenagers, driven both by religion and a desire to prevent non-smokers from succumbing to lung cancer been handing out anti-smoking pamphlets to tobacco executives attending a major industry convention in Kuala Lumpur since yesterday.

"I want to save people from picking up the smoking habit," said 13-year-old Ahmad Asyraf Shaari, a Third Former who believes that his efforts reflect his Muslim beliefs. "I will get 'pahala' (benefits) from Allah".



He was accompanied by his cousin Muhammad Solehin Kamaruzaman, 16, who believed that smoking could lead his peers to drug abuse.

"Teens face a lot of pressure from their peers to smoke or they come from broken families where there is a lack of love and care from parents or friends," he explained.

"We are doing this in the hope that it will create some awareness on the ill

effects of smoking among visitors to this convention."

The Tabinfo 2005 convention is touted to be the largest Asian tobacco machinery event with over 200 exhibitors from 60 countries, including suppliers of papers, filters, tipping paper, tobacco, adhesives and packaging materials.

A disclaimer on the convention's website says it is "closed to the general

The event will also see a gathering of key tobacco executives from companies in Austria, the Netherlands, Poland, Canada, China, India, Pakistan, Poland, Portugal, Switzerland, Britain and the US.

Deaf ears

The protest group outside the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre group was led by Ahmad Asyraf's father, Malaysian Council for Tobacco Control (MCTC) Honorary-Secretary Shaari Ahmad Junid and Fomca Vice-President K Koris.

"We tried getting a permit at the Dang Wangi district police headquarters but we were informed that one would be granted only tomorrow, after the three-day event





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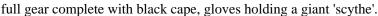
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- Death of a murderous fanatic

ends, but what's the point?"

"This is why we requested for help all the way from Canada. It is indeed a very sad day because Malaysians cannot openly and actively protest against the tobacco industry themselves. Our appeals to **protest** have so far fallen on deaf ears," he said.

To ensure that their protests against the tobacco industry were seen and heard, the MCTC enlisted help from Canada in the form of the 'Grim Reaper who appeared in



At the centre, despite assurances by the organisers that the event would be strictly by-invitation only, scores of people were seen walking around wearing visitor passes.

"Although the Health Ministry and the government said this would be limited only to industry people, I believe that anyone can enter upon registering themselves at the entrance," Shaari said.

Earlier, Shaari showed journalists samples of tobacco strips with very strong fruity flavours such as cherry and vanilla as well as packets of colourful filters he had picked up from the exhibition hall.



"As a father, I'm very worried about this new trend. Currently, there are no fruit-flavoured cigarettes sold in Malaysia but if this is not to target young children, why exhibit such flavours at all?" he said, referring to industry denials that children were not their target group.

Shaari, who is also Malaysian Association of Environmental

Health president, said he also discovered that tobacco executives were discussing an overview of the health warning against tobacco smoking issued by governments.

'Kiddie packs'

Asked if he knew the reason behind Kuala Lumpur City Hall's (DBKL) approval of the event given the national 'Tak Nak' no-smoking campaign and the protests registered early this year, Shaari said he had not been told why.

In <u>an interview</u> with malaysiakini in June, Shaari had highlighted specific laws and guidelines which he described as absurd because they hampered tobacco-control efforts.

Meanwhile, the man in the Grim Reaper costume, Errol E Povah, warned that the tobacco industry was actively targeting the younger generation while in the same denying such a charge.

"How many people whom you know had picked up smoking after they turned 18? I'd say maybe one or





two.

"Most people would have picked up the habit earlier in their teens, thanks to kiddie packs (small packs)," said Povah who is Action on Smoking & Health (Airspace) president, an organisation based in Canada.



"I'm not saying that Canada has resolved the tobacco issue and I'm not here to fix the issue in Malaysia but if the (Malaysian government) is doing its job, I won't be here today."

He said despite all the denials, the 'merchants of death' as he described the tobacco executives, were actively targeting children.











- 'Grim Reaper' appears at tobacco expo
- 06:29pm Mon Nov 14, 2005
- CAP: Cancer prevention better than cure
- 06:40pm Wed Oct 26, 2005
- Smoking-related diseases eating up health budget
- 01:20pm Mon Oct 17, 2005
- Tobacco industry successful, govt fails
- 04:57pm Thu Aug 25, 2005
- Govt says 'Tak Nak' campaign up in smoke
 - 05:57am Wed Aug 24, 2005
- Don't turn M'sia into regional tobacco hub, govt told
- 12:30pm Mon Jun 20, 2005
- RM20 billion to treat tobacco-related diseases each year
- 11:30am Thu Jun 16, 2005
- Absurd laws, guidelines hamper tobacco-control
- 03:51pm Mon Jun 13, 2005
- CAP: No place for flip-flop policy on tobacco control
 - 12:30pm Tue May 31, 2005
- Religious scriptures implicitly reject tobacco, says scholar
- 02:00pm Sat May 21, 2005
- Tobacco profits, healthcare costs do not add up
- 04:47pm Fri May 20, 2005
- Political will needed towards a smoke-free Malaysia
- 06:45pm Thu May 19, 2005

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