I REFER to the letter by Fauzi M. Anshar ("They shouldn't sell cigarettes" -- NST, March 6, 2012) on cigarettes being sold at Kedai Rakyat 1Malaysia. The writer says cigarettes are non-essential products that are harmful to health and therefore should not be sold at KR1M outlets.

I remembered the article clearly despite it being published two years ago. A recent article on KR1M in Sabah posted by an online portal made me revisit this issue.

The article, while not related to tobacco, had a picture of a KR1M outlet in Sabah.

I noted the possibility of cigarettes being sold although the picture was unclear.

Not wanting to make baseless complaints, I asked a friend in Kota Kinabalu to visit the nearest KR1M to take a photo to confirm my suspicions and found that KR1M outlets indeed sold cigarettes.

Although this is not against the law, the fact that KR1M is aimed at assisting the low-income group through subsidised food items does not sit well with the public health policies for tobacco control in our country.

Smoking is more prevalent in this group and rates of quitting are low. It would be good to remind that cigarettes and tobacco smoking kills nearly half of users if used as recommended.

As Malaysia is a member of the World Health Organisation’s Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, it has an obligation to reduce the number of smokers, which is currently at 23 per cent of the adult population group.

This is done through all means possible using the six MPOWER strategies: monitoring tobacco use, prevention and protection policies, offering help to quit tobacco use, warning about the dangers of tobacco, enforcing bans and raising taxes on tobacco.

One method that had been reported to be successful is the point-of-sale...
tobacco ban, where tobacco products are not allowed to be displayed or advertised at retail outlets. This had shown to reduce tobacco marketing. Perhaps the government should take the first step by not selling or promoting cigarettes in KR1M outlets.

Dr Amer Siddiq Amer Nordin, smoking cessation specialist, University Malaya Centre for Addiction Sciences, Kuala Lumpur

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