

# Zeroing in on single-use plastics

## Waste generated by bubble tea industry catches Selangor lawmakers' attention

THERE seems to be no let up in the growth of the bubble tea industry with new outlets sprouting up all the time, especially in suburban areas.

However, the plastic waste being generated is an issue that has several parties concerned, including Selangor lawmakers.

During the recent Selangor State Assembly sitting, Bandar Utama assemblyman Jamaliah Jamaluddin suggested that the state government tax bubble tea sellers that provide drinks in single-use plastic cups, plastic straws and cup covers.

Several lawmakers expressed concern over the amount of waste being produced from the single-use plastics generated by such shops which number more than 100.

Jamaliah said for a start, the state could give incentives to bubble tea makers that provide eco-friendly options to consumers.

"Later, the state government could tax businesses that are adamant in only serving single-use containers.

"The government could also collaborate with these businesses to encourage users to bring their own tumblers.

"We should think of creative ways to reduce all types of single-use plastics whenever possible," she said.

Jamaliah added that the beverage was mostly enjoyed by youths who should be mindful of the waste they produce.

"Some brands in Taiwan, where bubble tea is believed to have originated from, are now serving these drinks in paper cups," she said.

In July, state environment, green technology, science, innovation and consumer affairs committee chairman Hee Loy Sian launched the #bebasstrawplastik campaign in Selangor where plastic straws are not allowed to be displayed over the counter and can only be given upon request from customers.

He also announced that local authorities would collect the 20sen per plastic bag given out to shoppers at hypermarkets, supermarkets and selected minimarts from the operators themselves, starting Jan 1.

During the state assembly sitting, Hee said the state government would be inviting bubble tea businesses for a dialogue in December to discuss the issue.

"We want to encourage bubble tea business operators to use paper straws and cups.

"The business owners claim the cost would increase if they change from plastic to paper."

Subang Jaya assemblyman Michelle Ng said there might be legal reasons for the use of plastic by operators.

"The bubble tea



The main consumers of bubble tea are youth who should be mindful of the environment.

franchisees operate the business based on regulations set by the franchiser which requires them to use plastic cups and straws," she opined.

### Long-term impacts

Environment waste management specialist Dr Theng Lee Chong said an ideal solution to single-use plastic waste was to encourage consumers to bring their own containers.

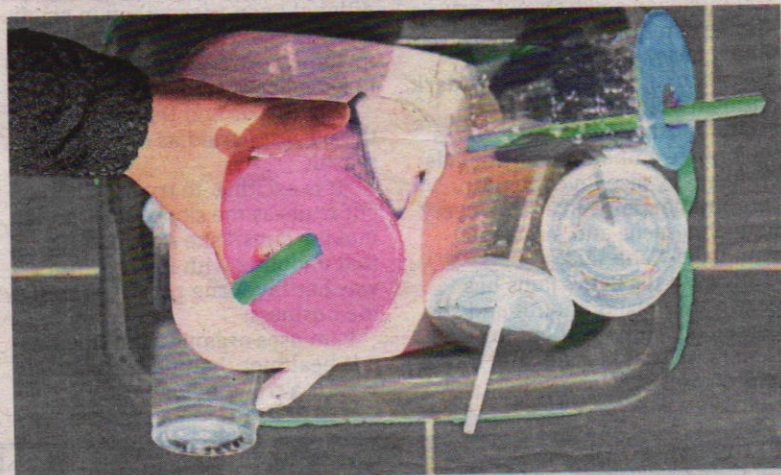
"We should have promotions encouraging the public to bring their own containers or return durable plastic waste.

"Plastic cups and straws can be reused and recycled for other purposes," he said.

Theng added that he was more worried about paper straws being sold in the market.

"I see businesses buying cheap paper straws sourced from overseas. Who is checking if these straws are safe for human consumption?"

"I am worried the safety of these



One solution to single-use plastic waste is to recycle the waste.

items may be compromised because of the bleaching agents, chemicals and glue used," he said.

Petaling Jaya City Council Solid Waste Management and Public Cleansing Department director Lee Lih Shyan said single-use plastic waste producers should be

taxed accordingly.

"When you tax for the waste produced, it is called the polluter pays concept.

"We could also emulate the producer responsibility concept whereby the waste producer would have a solution for the waste created such as coming up with ways for the product to be recycled." Greenpeace Malaysia campaigner Heng Kiah Chun said not only was plastic bad for the environment, every other "alternative" material was as well.

He cited the NGO's "Throwing Away The Future: How Companies Still Have It Wrong on Plastic Pollution Solutions" report.

"There is no way the planet can sustain additional demand from companies attempting to substitute their single-use plastic packaging with paper or cardboard.

"Companies must commit to overall reduction of packaging and shift to alternatives like reuse and refill.

"We call for the reduction of units sold in single-use packaging, and for investment in solutions focused on reuse, refill and other systems not dependent on disposables.

"Ultimately, companies need to rethink how products are delivered to the consumer," said Heng.

See *StarMetro* tomorrow for Part 2 on measures bubble tea operators are adopting to cut plastic use.

Plastic packaging and bubble tea is ubiquitous. — Photos: FAIHAN GHANI/The Star.