

## Health &amp; Science

# A green day: Canada legalizes marijuana for recreational use

## Its implementation will be scrutinized and dissected

**OTTAWA:** Nearly a century of marijuana prohibition came to an end yesterday as Canada became the first major Western nation to legalize and regulate its sale and recreational use. The change was praised by pot enthusiasts and investors in a budding industry that has seen pot stocks soar on the Toronto and New York stock exchanges, but sharply questioned by some health professionals and opposition politicians.

"We're not legalizing cannabis because we think it's good for our health. We're doing it because we know it's not good for our children," Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on the eve of the reform. "We know we need to do a better job to protect our children and to eliminate or massively reduce the profits that go to organized crime." The Cannabis Act, which fulfills a promise Trudeau made in the 2015 election campaign, makes Canada only the second nation after Uruguay to legalize the drug.

Its implementation will be scrutinized and dissected by Canadians ahead of the next election in 2019, as well as other nations that the prime minister has said may follow suit if the measure proves a success. Trudeau himself admitted in 2013 to having smoked pot five or six times in his life, including at a dinner party with friends after being elected to parliament. He has also said that his late brother Michel was facing marijuana possession charges for a "tiny amount" of pot before his death in an avalanche in 1998, and that this influenced his decision to propose legalizing cannabis. But Trudeau's office told AFP he "does not plan on purchasing or consuming cannabis once it is legalized."

In total, Statistics Canada says 5.4 million Canadians will buy cannabis from legal dispensaries in 2018 — about 15 percent of the population. Around 4.9 million already smoke. Stores in St John's in the Atlantic island province of Newfoundland were due to open their doors to pot enthusiasts as of 12:01 am local time (0231 GMT) yesterday. "I'm going to have a lot more variety than the black market dealers, so you have a lot more choice at our store. The prices are very comparable," Thomas Clarke, owner of

THC Distribution store, told public broadcaster CBC just prior to the big event.

### A new industry is born

Under the new regulations, Canadians at least 18 or 19 years old (soon to be 21 in Quebec) will be allowed to buy up to 30 grams of cannabis, and grow up to four plants at home. A patchwork of private and public cannabis retail stores and online sales have been set up across the 13 provinces and territories, ramping up to 300 storefronts by year's end, the government predicts. Sales of derivatives like edibles will be legalized next year.

To meet demand, hundreds of growers have been licensed, some taking over horticulture and floriculture greenhouses. This new industry has attracted billions in funding, as well as interest from alcohol and soft drink makers such as Constellation Brands and Coca-Cola, respectively, which have expressed an interest in developing cannabis infused drinks. Cannabis sales are forecast to boost economic growth by up to Can\$1.1 billion and provide a Can\$400 million tax revenue windfall for the government, according to Statistics Canada.

Public health officials contend that smoking cannabis is as harmful as tobacco, but welcome what they call the opportunity that legalization affords for open dialogue. Some doctors, however, remain wary. Diane Kelsall, editor in chief of the Canadian Medical Association Journal, called legalization "a national, uncontrolled experiment in which the profits of cannabis producers and tax revenues are squarely pitched against the health of Canadians."

Police, meanwhile, are scrambling to prepare for a predicted uptick in drug-impaired driving. It's unclear as yet if the new framework will succeed in undercutting the black market, as prices for illicit pot have plunged in the last year to an average of Can\$6.79 per gram, and most sellers had planned to charge more. Bill Blair, a former police chief in Toronto who is Trudeau's pointman for pot legalization,



**TORONTO:** Torontonians gather at a local concert venue to watch the "bud drop" at the stroke of midnight, in celebration of the legalization of recreational cannabis use. — AFP

remains optimistic. "For almost a century, criminal enterprises had complete control of this market, 100 percent of its production and distribution and they profited in the billions of dollars each year. I suspect they're not going to go gently into the night," he told AFP. "But the fact that some

individuals want to cling to a prohibition model that has led to the highest rates of cannabis use of any country in the world is a little shocking to me," he said. According to a recent Abacus Data poll published on Monday, 70 percent of Canadians accept or support legalization. — AFP

## Smell and stress sensors a smash at Tokyo tech fair

**MAKHARI:** State-of-the-art sensors that can measure stress levels, mood, posture, performance and even smell took centre stage at Asia's top high-tech fair in Tokyo. The big-screen TVs and entertainment systems that were all the rage 10 years ago at the CEATEC fair have gradually been replaced by tiny sensors that accurately measure the minutest facet of the human body — a Japanese specialty.

Electronics giant Panasonic showcased a prototype of an armchair that measures how much the user's hands sweat along with the seating position and facial expressions via a camera, all to determine stress levels. This could be useful for an airline pilot or long-distance truck driver for example but could also one day find its way into the workplace.

"You could imagine such a chair in the office and by combining the results with air conditioning and lighting levels, you could adjust the ambiance of the office to enable people to relax if necessary," a Panasonic demonstrator said. Components manufacturer Murata Manufacturing has pioneered a small device that is held for a minute between the thumb and forefinger to measure pulse rates and the nervous system.

"We are going to start selling this very soon to companies, so they can measure how stressed their employees are. Transport and taxi companies are especially interested," said Takashi Hayashida, a spokesman for the firm. Staff equipped with sensors could be under permanent surveillance to "improve their posture and productivity," according to Japanese electronics firm TDK. This also extends to the field of play, with Fujitsu demonstrat-

ing a 3D analytical system based on sensors to improve the performance of gymnasts.

### Stress smells like onions

Sensors are also being put to work to improve healthcare — especially for the elderly, with nearly 28 percent of the Japanese population over 65. Using a device created by hygiene firm Lion, patients worried about their teeth can flash a smile at a smartphone and send it to a specialized server that returns data on oral hygiene. Housing equipment firm Lixil has developed a sensor for the bathtub that measures water temperature and key vital signs like pulse and body temperature in an attempt to reduce sudden bath deaths, which afflict more than 5,000 people annually in the country, 90 percent of them over 65.

At the other end of the age scale, sensors are being deployed in a bid to ease labor shortages in kindergartens and crèches. Japan's public New Energy and Industrial Technology Development Organization has developed a super-fine and sensitive film that can perform a host of functions related to childcare.

For example, placed in a cot, it can upload data to a computer showing whether a baby rolls onto its stomach or its temperature spikes — alerting an adult if necessary. "There is a staff shortage in creches. We need solutions to ease their task and enable them to watch over more children at a time," said a demonstrator. The same film can be used to determine how much and at what speed a meal is eaten — in a hospital or retirement home for example — by measuring the pressure applied on a table by a bowl or plate.

Of course, much effort is also devoted to matters that are less life and death, especially body odor, to which the Japanese are especially sensitive. Cosmetics giant Shiseido recently commissioned a study to demonstrate that the odor given off by a person under stress smells like... onions. And the sensors are not just for humans. Sharp has developed a cat litter tray equipped with monitors to measure kitty's urine volume and frequency. — AFP

## Facebook makes reality TV its new weapon

**CANNES:** Facebook said yesterday it was reviving the pioneering MTV reality show "The Real World" as its secret weapon to lure viewers away from YouTube. The social media giant said it was also trying to harness the formidable online power of the "cute kitten" factor with a new show called "World's Most Amazing Dog" on its new Facebook Watch platform.

Users who think their pooch is cute enough to be a contender can enter audition videos from their phones, it told TV executives at MIPCOM in Cannes, the world's top entertainment showcase. The company's head of video Paresch Rajwat said Facebook Watch — which began to be rolled out in the US last year — was now available across the world, with "the time people spend on it increasing by 14 times since". "The Real World" was one of the first "social experiment" TV reality shows when it aired in 1992, spawning others like "Big Brother". It turns on the moment when "seven strangers put together stop being polite and start being real," said Facebook's content and strategy chief Matthew Henick. Three versions of the new Facebook variant of the show will be launched simultaneously in the US, Mexico and Thailand.

Users will be able to "co-watch with their friends and interact with the contestants", stealing a march on its internet rivals, Henick told the gathering in the French Riviera resort. Rajwat said Facebook Watch was "completely open" and was already being used by broadcasters, with new contestants on Germany's "X Factor" recently being introduced to fans on the platform before



**MENLO PARK:** In this file photo taken on March 21, 2018 a lit sign is seen at the entrance to Facebook's corporate headquarters location. — AFP

they made their TV debuts. He said its interactivity means "watching videos doesn't have to be a passive experience... with friends able to co-watch together in real time". A new service called "Watch Party" allowing "people to watch and comment all at the same time" has already been used on celebrity chef Jamie Oliver's "Veggie Challenge", he added.

A Facebook Watch show called "Sorry For Your Loss" about a "young widow struggling to put her life back together has led to long meaningful conversations about dealing with grief", Rajwat said, with many users "offering help to people who lost their beloveds. This is where Facebook is different," he said. MTV boss Chris McCarthy predicted that Facebook Watch was going to "create a whole new genre of shared reality TV", and help shows lift off when it was "harder and harder to break through with more and more content" out there. — AFP

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