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PADANG BESAR: Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Azlan Man says he will not allow the planting of ketum trees in Perlis in efforts to curb social problems caused by the abuse of the plant.

He said he would strive to ensure that the offence involving the abuse of ketum leaves be put under the Dangerous Drugs Act 1952.

"I don't want to see a ketum tree planted in Perlis, but what can we

do, the law still permits the planting of ketum.

"The Government has to spend a lot of money in dealing with cases involving ketum and the increase in crime cases due to the abuse of the plant," he told reporters after handing over land ownership titles to 166 recipients in Beseri, near here yesterday.

In September 2017, *The Star* reported that the authorities are acting to clamp down on the con-

sumption and sale of ketum leaves by increasing fines by up to 10 times and imposing a longer jail sentence on offenders.

This comes as more than 14,000 people have been arrested for abuse since 2015 and large tracts of land, particularly in northern states like Perlis, Kedah, Kelantan and parts of Perak, planted with the trees, many of which can be seen from the main roads or highways.

While the planting of ketum trees is not a crime, doing this on a commercial scale – including picking and processing the leaves – has been an offence under the Poisons Act 1952 (revised 1989) since 2004.

Earlier, Azlan said the state government would try to expedite the process of approving land ownership applications that had been submitted for more than five years.

He said until last year, the state government had issued ownership titles to over 1,000 applications which exceeded 10 years.

Meanwhile, Azlan urged government agencies in the state to continue working together through the National Blue Ocean Strategy in discharging their responsibilities to implement development projects by taking into account the Perlis Budget 2018 which was tabled in December last year.