

Amendments to dangerous drugs act to list ketum leaves

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KUALA LUMPUR: The bill on Dangerous Drugs Act 1952 (Amendment) 2014 was presented for second reading in the Dewan Rakyat today, among others, to provide a new definition for ketum leaves and listed it as a dangerous drug.

The proposed amendment also includes restrictions of importation, exportation, possession, cultivation, ketum business and to provide a jurisdiction in regulating the production and matters relating to the leaves.

Deputy Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Hilmi Yahaya when tabling the bill, said the Poisons Act 1952, which is currently used to control the abuse of ketum leaves was not strong enough to curb the activities.

Thus, he said, there was a need to define the ketum leaves as a dangerous drug so that the stringent control of its misuse could be implemented.

"The control of ketum leaves abuse can be increased if it is listed as a dangerous drug because under the existing law under the Poison Act, less effective enforcement action could be taken," he said.

He said the amendment was also to enable the ketum leaves to be listed in the First Schedule of the Dangerous Drugs Act, which also lists other crops like marijuana plant, cannabis, poppy and coca.

Hilmi said the amendments also include several sections under the Act, which provides for the import, export, possession, cultivation and ketum business as an offence.

Explaining further, he said, the ketum or the original name "kratum" is a plant of the Rubiaceae family, which is abundant in the northern states of the peninsular.

He said the leaves gave almost the same effect as opiate drugs that caused adverse effects to individuals such as loss of self-control, feeling tired and lazy, less sensitive to physical and emotional pain.

"In addition it will make the pupils smaller, nausea, frequent urination, poor appetite, weight loss, constipation and insomnia," he said.

He said the leaves was also used in traditional medication but there was no medical research to prove its effectiveness.

Hilmi said the bill would be tabled in the next sitting of the Dewan Rakyat.

When debating on the bill, Che Mohamad Zulkifly Jusoh (BN-Setiu) suggested that the amendment be postponed to avoid persecuting the villagers for planting and using ketum for medicinal and healthcare purposes.

Meanwhile Datuk Bung Mokhtar Radin (BN-Kinabatangan) agreed with the amendment but requested that legal enforcement be delayed for a period of six months in order to provide information on the dangers of ketum to the villagers.

He also suggested that a scientific study on the benefits of ketum be conducted.

Gobind Singh Deo (DAP-Puchong) questioned the general definition of the offence to possess and use ketum in the amendment that could not serve as a deterrent for ketum addicts or protect those using it for medicinal purposes.

– *Bernama*