

Gov't says no to commercial ketum idea

Posted on 4 August 2016 - 04:58pm

Last updated on 4 August 2016 - 07:10pm

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A file picture of enforcement officials poisoning ketum plants in Kampung Ganchong near Pekan, Pahang on June 15, 2010. — Bernama

KUALA LUMPUR: The government has decided that ketum cannot be planted on a commercial basis, said Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Ahmad Zahid Hamidi.

Ahmad Zahid said he had instructed the Rural and Regional Development Ministry to inform the Rubber Industries Smallholders Development Authority (Risda) not to proceed with the proposal.

"We have consulted experts from the Health Ministry and the police narcotics department where we found out that the product has more negative than positive implications,"

"Thus we have decided that ketum could not be planted on a commercial or marketing basis, what more to export the product," he said when met by reporters after attending the Media Prima Hari-Raya celebration held at the Sime Darby Convention Centre here.

He however said more scientific studies should be undertaken on ketum leaves before the government can decide on commercialising it.

"The scientific studies can be done especially by the Institute of Medical Research Malaysia.

"This procedure will take time, but for the time being, it is illegal to commercialise ketum," he said. At the moment, the commercialisation of ketum trees is against Section 30(3) of the Poisons Act 1952 which has listed its leaves among prohibited properties.

Last week, Risda chairman Datuk Zahidi Zainul Abidin said there is a high demand for ketum leaves abroad especially in the United States and Europe due to its many health benefits.

He urged the government to allow the planting of ketum trees for commercial purposes.

Zahidi, who is also the Padang Besar MP said small-scale farmers would lose the opportunity to increase their income if the government rejects the proposal.