

Health Minister: Reconsider classifying ketum as dangerous drug

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Subramaniam said that getting ketum listed has been a problem in the past as some communities still use it as part of their cultural practices. — Picture by Yusof Mat Isa

PUTRAJAYA, July 13 — Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr S. Subramaniam said today it was time to reconsider classifying ketum leaves under the Dangerous Drugs Act, after the authorities discovered its usage in snacks.

The minister said that getting ketum listed has been a problem in the past as some communities still use it as part of their cultural practices.

“I think now the Home Ministry and Health Ministry are in line, and with students putting it in drinks, and taking it in different forms, we have to revisit the risks associated with ketum and how we are going to manage this as a drug,” he told reporters at the Health Ministry office here.

Dr Subramaniam added that ketum is also difficult to address as the plant grows in the wild in the northern peninsula

The abuse of ketum is prohibited under Section 30(3) of the Poisons Act 1952 that allows for a maximum fine of RM10,000, or imprisonment of up to four years, but offenders are reportedly generally only fined.

It was reported yesterday that the Kedah National Anti-Drug Agency had identified a trend of ketum leave abuse — by turning it into snacks — which was detected in Penang through intelligence efforts.

The Health Ministry last year withdrew the Bill to amend the Dangerous Drugs Act to include ketum leaves in Parliament following objections of fear that it would victimise villagers, leaving the Bill in the hands of the Home Ministry for further action. Last November, Deputy Home Minister Datuk Nur Jazlan Mohamed said the Bill's definition of ketum leaves was being fine-tuned, and expected to be tabled sometime this year.