

## **Kedah anti-drug agency says inclusion in snacks latest trend in ketum abuse**

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SETAR, 12 July — The Kedah National Anti-Drug Agency has identified the latest trend in the abuse of ketum leaves where ketum snacks are produced in less than three minutes. Its director Mohammed Nazer Mustafa said it was detected in Penang through intelligence efforts, but was still new and not widespread.

“The way it is produced is very easy, just by dipping the ketum leaves in flour and frying it as usual, then they can eat it like a normal snack as it is crunchy,” he told Bernama.

He said he was worried this trend would spread to Kedah as it was among the states with the most ketum plants in the country.

Without disclosing the location for the ketum snacks, Nazer said it was believed to be at the ‘test market’ stage before it is spread to other areas.

“The first phase may just be testing the market to find out if there is demand for it, so they are only making it at home.

It is possible that they will package it with ketum juice and market it in stalls, and this is what we are afraid of,” he said.

He added that the government must immediately place ketum under the Dangerous Drugs Act 1952 so that action could be taken against the people who grew ketum plants.

He said according to state records, there were currently 81 ketum operators in Kedah, with the most in Padang Terap (40), Kubang Pasu (17), Kota Setar and Pokok Sena (13), Baling (10) and one in Sik.

“At present, we cannot take action against the ketum operators as planting it is not a crime, it is only when you pluck the leaves does it become an offence.

“So the tactic used by the operators is when a person wants to buy the ketum, he will have to pluck the leaves himself.

So the operator will not face any action from the enforcers,” he said.

In Malaysia, abuse of ketum comes under Section 30(3) of the Poisons Act 1952 which provides for a maximum fine of RM10,000, a jail sentence of up to four years, or both, but in most cases, the offenders are only fined. — Bernama -