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27/7/2017 Ahmad Zakaria showing a photo of Guarana fruits during the press conference in Putrajaya.

Prohibited Guarana seeds causing disease found in Baling nursery

PUTRAJAYA: The Department of Agriculture has found Guarana seeds which have been prohibited from being brought into the country, planted in a nursery in Baling, Kedah.

The department has banned the importation of Guarana seeds and saplings from Brazil and the American Tropics for fear that the South American leaf blight (Salb) disease could threaten rubber plants.

Agriculture Director-General Datuk Ahmad Zakaria Mohamad Sidek said the department had seized 30,000 Guarana saplings, brought illegally into the country, from the nursery for monitoring to ensure that Salb spores had not spread to the surrounding areas.

"The department will work with the Malaysian Rubber Board to monitor the surrounding area and the entrance path to the nursery for six months to ensure that there are no Salb disease symptoms.

"If the Salb spores are transmitted to rubber trees, they can germinate and spread, resulting in the spread of the dis-

ease," he told a press conference, here Wednesday.

Ahmad Zakaria said the import of any seeds or plants from the tropical regions of America was prohibited under the Plant Quarantine Regulations 1981, except for research purposes.

Salb, caused by the fungus *Microcyclus ulei*, can cause stunted growth of rubber tree saplings and, if the attack occurs on big trees, it could cause the trees to become dry and non-productive causing dieback of trees, he said.

"This situation can cripple the country's rubber industry worth more than RM18 billion a year," he added.

According to Ahmad Zakaria, rubber industries in several countries such as Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Surinam and Panama had sustained severe losses due to the Salb disease over the years.

Guarana is a herbal plant that is used as a dietary supplement and provides energy because its caffeine content is twice as high compared to coffee beans. - Bernama

ROHIBITED GUARANA SEEDS CAUSING DISEASE FOUND IN BALING NURSERY

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