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Re-ploughing may be answer to smoke problem

JITRA, Sun. - Re-ploughing padi fields instead of burning may be the answer to the problem of thick smoke coming from the burning fields located along the Gurun-Alor Star stretch of the North-South Expressway.

The Agriculture Ministry is planning to "sell" this traditional method of disposing of padi stubble to farmers whose plots are located along the stretch.

Agriculture Ministry Parliamentary Secretary Datuk Abu Bakar Taib said it was preferable to open burning, which posed danger to motorists as the thick smoke reduced visibility on the highway.

He said re-ploughing would also improve the soil's texture and act as a natural fertiliser, adding that the technique was widely used in Sekinchan, Selangor and Jerlun, Kedah.

"We will meet with Mada (Muda Agricultural Development Authority) and farmers association in the area to discuss ways to persuade the members to use this method.

"We cannot tell the farmers not to burn their straw as this is provided for in the Environment Quality Act 1974.

"But they should instead re-plough their straw into the soil," he said when met at Former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's open house at Dewan Wawasan, here.

Also present were Tun Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali and Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Syed Razak Syed Zain.

Last Sunday, smoke from a burning field caused a 21-vehicle pile up at Km59.8. Five people were injured in the incident.

Meanwhile, Syed Razak said the State Government would go ahead with its plan to plant banana trees and other trees including teak along the affected stretch of the highway, despite criticisms from non-governmental organisations.

He said the trees would help divert some of the smoke from being blown across the highway.

"Their presence will not solve the problem totally but will help in some way to deflect the smoke.

"We noticed the problem is not so bad in areas where there are trees."

To those who criticised the idea, Syed Razak said: "Don't just criticise us. Give suggestions and alternatives for us to study."