

Abg Johari: State will review its forest policy

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KUCHING: Chief Minister Datuk Amar Abang Johari Tun Openg says the state will review its forest policy, which does not necessarily require its trees to be cut.

He said the government, while acknowledging the importance of timber in generating the state's revenue, also wanted to make sure that its forests are preserved and protected.

He noted that his late predecessor had banned the issuance of short term timber licences and assured that he would continue with that policy.

"We are not going to lift the ban on state land. However, we will continue to allow companies to collect timber from areas that have been identified for development, especially for agriculture activities under the native customary rights (NCR) land.

"But as far as the state forest is concerned, we are not going to give new timber licences," he assured at the opening of the forum on forest landscape here yesterday.

At the same time, he said, the state also wanted to maintain its permanent forest reserve and restore those that had been logged.

"I will continue with my predecessor's policy and if possible we don't have to cut our trees.

"Of course some people asked me, where are you going to get revenue? Then I said in the world today forest is precious. Why is it precious? Because it has value," he said.

Abang Johari noted that a lot of people today wanted to see forests, saying it was for that reason Semmenggoh Wildlife Centre and Bako National Park had become the key tourism attraction in the state.

He said foreigners coming to see Sarawak's forests can be charged fees, which then will bring revenue to the state.

"Meaning the Sarawak Forestry Corporation (SFC) has to change their approach. Make the reserve forests and the totally protected forests the commodities to earn revenue, but not by cutting.

"Make those places for the people to appreciate nature and carry out researches, and that is the way for Sarawak to move forward," he said.

Adding that SFC should not worry about revenue but preserve the state's forests because they are precious, he said anything that is precious always has value.

"For example, if you see a beautiful woman, you can say anything about that beautiful woman because you appreciate her beauty.

"It's the same analogy," he said.

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