

# Sarawak looking at industrial forests to preserve natural forests

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KUCHING: The state government is now instituting industrial forests as a way forward to preserve the dwindling natural forests.

Chief Minister Datuk Amar Abang Johari Tun Openg said both he and Second Resource Planning and Environment Minister Datuk Amar Awang Tengah Ali Hasan had agreed that this move would benefit the timber industry.

“Awang Tengah and I thought there must be industrial forests where you don’t touch the permanent forests or protected forests. You plant trees that can grow fast. After five years, you can harvest so we are now instituting industrial forest.

“We have agreed that we develop industrial forests meant for industry. It won’t disturb our forests. Our forests are precious and for the tourists, they have to pay to see our forests,” he said in his speech at the Chief Minister’s keynote address with the state civil service here on Tuesday.

But the idea was met with reservation by the timber tycoons in the state, added Abang Johari.

“They had reservations but I told them, you have not tried, try first. There must be research and development (R&D). It is just a matter of how to accelerate the growth (of the trees) and that is where they have to do research.”

He said he had called on the timber tycoons to invest some money into conducting R&D, adding by doing that the state’s timber industry could progress in compliance with international standards.

On another matter, Abang Johari said the state must be financially independent as it could not entirely rely on the federal government.

“But Putrajaya has to help us because it is an obligation as stated in the Federal Constitution but at the same time, we cannot rely on them 100 per cent. We have to be on our own also.

“That is why I have the new financial model. I cannot announce it here but there are indications that the new financial model will be approved by the federal government.”

He said this would mean that the state would frog-leap its development using its own resources.

“We have to be creative in terms of sourcing for funds and at the same time use the funds to accelerate to catch up with national economy.”

Abang Johari said the state would be like Bavaria in Germany if the state government’s strategic approach works well by 2030.

“We will be like Bavaria in Germany. Germany is a federation and Bavaria is the strongest state in Germany. So I want Sarawak to be the strongest state in Malaysia.”

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