

Tapping our forests for biotech industry

By Yunus Yussop on March 24, 2019, Sunday at 12:15 AM



Awang Tengah waters a newly planted sapling to declare open the event while others give their thumbs-up.

BINTULU: Sarawak's forest biodiversity has the potential to become the basis for the development of its biotechnology industry.

Deputy Chief Minister Datuk Amar Awang Tengah Ali Hasan, in stating this, said among the potential products were those ranging from supplements and spices to cosmetics, perfumes to ornamental plants.

In transforming the timber industry, the Sarawak government, he added, was aiming to produce high value-added products through collaboration with the relevant higher learning institutions on research and development.

"Our forest is important to Sarawak and its people. Sarawak is blessed with rich forest resources that have played an important role in the economic development of Sarawak," he added.

Awang Tengah, who is Minister of Urban Development and Natural Resources and Minister of Industrial and Entrepreneur Development, said this when officiating at the launching of the

state-level International Day of Forest 2019 with the theme 'Forests and Education' at Universiti Putra Malaysia Bintulu campus here yesterday.

He added that the Sarawak government was fully committed to ensuring its forest treasures were well managed for the present and future generations with good and sustainable forest management policies, which included Sarawak Timber Legality Verification System, Sarawak Land Use Policy Statement, and others.

"We will protect and preserve our natural resources in order to have a balance between development needs and the need to protect and preserve the environment," he said.

He said to achieve a sustainable forest resources, the government had targeted six million hectares for permanent forest estate (PFE), and to-date about 4.32 million hectares have been gazetted.

Sarawak had also gazetted 816,170.40 hectares of land and 1,243,726 hectares of water body as totally protected area (TPA).

The government had developed the land use policy statement by allocating seven million hectares for forestry sector, of which six million hectares are for PFE and one million hectares for TPA.

Four million hectares have been allocated for agriculture purposes of which three million hectares are for oil palm estates and small holdings and one million hectares for other crop such as pepper, rubber, coconut.

The balance is for other land usage such as for settlement, hydro-electric projects and others.

Awang Tengah also talked about Sarawak's commitment against illegal logging activities, and called for the support of all parties including the grassroots leaders to become the eyes and ears of the government in giving the relevant information.

"If we are not concerned about this, we will be exposed to natural disasters," he added.

During the event, Awang Tengah also witnessed the signing of two memoranda of Understandings (MoUs) between UPM and Sarawak Forest Department, and between UPM and Pusaka.

UPM was represented by its deputy vice chancellor (academic and international) Prof Dr M Iqbal Saripan while Forest Department was represented by its director Hamden Mohamad and Pusaka by its general manager Hashim Bojet.

Minister of Utilities Dato Dr Stephen Rundi, Minister in the Chief Minister's Office (Integrity and Ombudsman) Datuk Talib Zulpilip, Assistant Minister of Urban Planning, Land Administration and Environment Datu Len Talif, permanent secretary to the Ministry of Urban Development and Natural Resources Datu Dr Wan Lizozman Wan Omar, STA council member Yek Siew Liong and Bintulu Resident Jack Aman Luat were among those present.