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Plan set to accelerate growth of timber industry

Samuel Aubrey

KUCHING: The Sarawak Timber Industry Transformation and Reformation Plan has been initiated to accelerate the growth of the industry, says Deputy Premier Datuk Amar Awang Tengah Ali Hasan.

He said this strategic initiative should augur well with the Forestry and Timber Industry Master Plan 2020-2030 and the state's Post Covid-19 Development Strategy (PCDS) 2030, towards ensuring resilience and generating RM8 billion in export earnings by 2030.

"These initiatives are necessary to boost high value-added wood-based and plywood products, particularly furniture and engineered wood, as well as bamboo-based products, to support the local industry through innovation, state-of-the-art technology, automation and support of the industry players.

"Towards that end, the state government is promoting planted forests to ensure sustainable supply of raw materials," he said in a press release issued by Sarawak Timber Industry Development Corporation (STIDC) last Saturday.

Awang Tengah, who is also Minister of International Trade and Investment and STIDC chairman, stated this when speaking to Malaysian Timber Council (MTC) delegates during an industry engagement roadshow to Sarawak on Friday.

Awang Tengah, who is also Second Minister of Natural Resources and Urban Development, said a furniture testing lab was under construction in Kota Samarahan to provide furniture-testing services meant to meet the global standards for both domestic and international markets.

"The government is also collaborating with the industry players to develop furniture parks in Kuching and Tanjong Manis to attract investors to develop furniture industry for export markets. This would bring RM500 million worth of investment to Sarawak besides generating RM4 billion in export

earnings by 2030," he added.

Awang Tengah also said under the Sarawak Young Designers (SayD'SignerSarawak) Programme, STIDC was collaborating with Bandung

Institute of Technology, Polytechnic University of Milan and Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas) to train and produce world-class furniture designers.

"This is aimed at supporting the timber industry and to produce furniture for global market," he pointed out.

"At the same time, the government through STIDC is promoting bamboo planting. The Bamboo Industry Development

Masterplan was formulated in 2019.

"Its emphasis is on resource management, market development, technology adoption and commercialisation, research and development, sustainable environment, capacity building, corporate social responsibility as well as policy and institutional strengthening."

According to the Deputy Premier, Sarawak aspires to have various bamboo-based industries by 2030 to produce charcoal, pharmaceutical, cosmetic, textile, pulp and paper, food, handicraft and engineered bamboo

products such as bamboo ply, strand woven bamboo and glued-laminated-bamboo.

"We also aim to plant at least 20,000 hectares of bamboo for industrial purposes to generate RM200 million in export earnings by 2030, and to create 5,000 employments with household income of RM36 million per year."

In this respect, he said STIDC was collaborating with research institutions such as Forest Industry Research Malaysia (FRIM) and Sirim Bhd in conducting research and development on local planted timber and bamboo species.

The same collaboration would also be held with universities like Unimas, Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM), Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), University of Technology Sarawak (UTS) and Swinburne University of Technology Sarawak Campus.

"The aim is to innovate production technology towards producing high value-added wood-based and bamboo-based products to generate high income," said Awang Tengah.

Meanwhile, MTC pledged to collaborate with STIDC in promoting high value-added timber products to achieve the national export target of RM28 billion by 2030.

MTC also hoped to cooperate with the related state agencies particularly STIDC, Forest Department and Sarawak Timber Association in addressing international trade barriers in order to facilitate forest certification initiatives and timber trade in the global market.

Present at the meeting between STIDC and MTC were Ministry of Urban Development and Natural Resources permanent secretary Datu Zaidi Mahdi, STIDC general manager Datu Hashim Bojet and MTC chief executive officer Muhtar Suhaili.

Other attendees included Sarawak Forest Department deputy director Jack Liam, Sarawak Timber Association chief executive officer Annie Ting, MTC delegates, and members of STIDC and Harwood Timber Sdn Bhd managements.

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Awang Tengah (fifth left) and Muhtar in a discussion after the exchange of mementos. — Photo courtesy of STIDC