

Exploit potential of rubber wood, government told

BP theborneopost.com/2017/05/17/exploit-potential-of-rubber-wood-government-told/

5/17/2017

KUCHING: The state government is urged to exploit the potential of rubber wood which can generate lucrative income to the planters and the state.

David Wong Kee Woan (DAP-Pelawan) said rubber could bring billions of ringit in revenue without cutting down the state's natural forest.

He said all the government had to do is to open its ears and minds to the ideas and formulate policies in support of people who wish to venture into the rubberwood business.

"Our government policies should be people and business-friendly so that the private sector can play its parts to bring business and economic developments to Sarawak," he said when debating the TYT's address yesterday.

Wong claimed that he had recently met a local who tried to start a rubber wood processing factory in Sibü.

"He has obtained the rubber wood export licence, but he can't get the licence to build a rubber wood factory in Sibü. To obtain the production and processing licence, the government wants the company to go to Tanjong Manis to buy an industrial lot.

He also said the government wanted every small plantation owner to go to the Forest Department to apply for a clearance licence, which burdens the small plantation owners immensely.

He also questioned the need for the small plantation owners to obtain clearance licence from the Forest Department since rubber trees were planted by themselves unlike the forest wood," he said.

Wong noted that the previous deputy chief minister Datuk Patinggi Tan Sri Alfred Jabu has stated in 2013 that 20,000 ha of land had been opened up for rubber plantation in the state in addition of the existing 16,000ha of matured plantation and 8,250ha that had been cultivated in 2012.

Jabu further stated that the government had targeted to open up 250,000ha of rubber plantation across the state by 2020.

"I don't know how many of the 250,000ha have been planted but one thing is clear, we have not counted the thousands of hectares of rubber plantations belonging to the small holders," he said.

Wong believed that Sarawak had abundant supply of rubber wood which all these while been left to rot.

He said rubber wood was the main choice of wood for furniture due to its beautiful texture and durability.

He added that time was the key issue in dealing with rubber wood, from logging to cutting, to the injection of anti-corrosive chemical and the 48-hour drying process.

"That's why a factory needs to be built near the source of supply," he said.

Wong believed that rubber wood could bring tens of billions of ringit in downstream activities, bringing business opportunities and job creation for Sarawakians.

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