



KERATAN AKHBAR

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Xavier: Reforestation is the way forward

PUTRAJAYA: A massive reforestation programme, including to rehabilitate land left barren by logging, is expected to be introduced, says Dr Xavier Jayakumar.

A non-governmental organisation called the Tropical Rainforest Conservation & Research Centre (TRCRC) would receive a grant from the Norwegian government to conduct the reforestation, said the Water, Land and Natural Resources Minister.

"It's like an FDI. You come in, we sell green bonds. We say we are doing reforestation. We give you the land, you come and plant," he said in an exclusive interview with *Sunday Star* recently.

After a cycle of six to seven years, the forest could be reharvested for a downline industry such as bio plastics.

"The states have to agree because the land is under the states. Now you have wide open barren land after logging. So why don't we do reforestation and let people outside bring in the FDI to do this? In the long term, I think the country will gain by this," he said.

Dr Xavier said that currently, 52% of Malaysia was under forest cover but if Sarawak and Sabah were not included, Peninsular Malaysia would not even reach 50%.

He said that three states – Kedah, Pahang and Kelantan – were undergoing rapid deforestation due to logging.

"The states will say that it is their only source of revenue," he said, adding that illegal logging was not much of a problem now compared to before as they had drones to monitor forests.

He said in terms of permit values, the logging could be worth RM500mil a year to the states, but the industries could be 10 times the amount.

"We can tell them you cannot log anymore, we have to preserve the water basins. There are dams built and water retention areas built.

The states have to agree because the land is under the states.

Dr Xavier Jayakumar

"So they turn around and tell you if don't want us to log, give us compensation. How do you calculate the value? It's not sustainable that way," he said.

He gave the example of the Ulu Muda forest reserve in Kedah as one that was experiencing deforestation at a very rapid stage.

He said the forest reserve acted as a water catchment area for Kedah, Penang, Perlis and Langkawi.

He, however, said that a balance was needed because the removal of forests could cause natural disasters such as floods and landslides, as what happened in Penang and Cameron Highlands in recent years.

"And these are not one-offs. They are bound to happen again but I can't tell you when," he said.

Deforestation is the second leading cause of global warming, and has been linked extreme weather occurrences and the increasing severity of the floods in the country, such as those seen in Kelantan and Johor in recent times.

Deforestation is also threatening the livelihood and survival of the orang asli.

Malaysia is a signatory of the 1992 Rio Convention, with the country pledging to maintain 50% of land area under permanent forest and tree cover.



He means business:
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