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Planting of forest species better option than oil palm for plantation companies

Awang Jambul

THE recent statement by Minister for Primary Industries Datuk Seri Lim Keng Yaik does not make sense.

He said the present low price for palm oil was due to over production.

Yet, on the other hand, he asked the plantation industry to replant some 300,000 hectares of oil palm.

If such a large area is replanted, there will again be surplus of palm oil in the next 10 years.

Surely, what makes better sense is for the Government to direct the plantation industry to plant commercial forest species instead of oil palm on the 300,000 hectares.

This is in line with the Federal Government's policy, fully backed by the vision of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad. It has been proven that commercial tree species such as teak, acacia mangium, mahogany, albezia felceteria, sentang, sungkai and others species can be successfully and profitably grown in Malaysia.

What is needed is a definite government policy on commercial tree plantations, including special funds to provide financial backing.

The Ministry of Primary Industry should be aware that there is a shortage of over 90 million cubic metres of timber yearly worldwide.

In addition, it is a matter of time before the developed world imposes a total ban on cutting trees in the natural forests for commercial use whether the developing nations like it or not.

It is surprising that the Minister is unable to produce a definite policy on cultivation of commercial tree plantations despite having two timber bodies under his ministry - the Timber Board and the Forest Research Institute.

These two bodies can very well advise the Minister that it would be better to plant the 300,000 hectares with commercial forest species to establish tree plantations rather than replant with oil palm that would create a surplus.