

Malaysia and EU to define legal issue in timber trade

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KUCHING: Malaysia and the European Union will meet in two weeks to define what is "legal" in the timber trade between the two sides.

"We define 'legal' to mean timber that has been extracted according to Malaysian law and regulations.

"This definition is accepted by Japan but the EU defines legality differently," said Sarawak Timber Industry Development Corporation (STIDC) general manager Datuk Len Talif Salleh.

"But it can be worked out," he told reporters at a World Forestry Day event, organised by Sarawak Forestry at the Semenggoh Seed Bank here yesterday.

Second state Minister of Planning and Resource Management, Datuk Awang Tengah Ali Hassan planted a tree to mark the event.

He also witnessed the presentation of ISO 9001:2000 certificates for quality management to two Sarawak Forestry business units.

Len Talif said negotiations to formalise a voluntary partnership agreement (VPA) on tim-

ber between Malaysia and the EU could be concluded by the end of the year.

A second round of talks is scheduled to take place in Brussels in two weeks for both parties to iron out the parameters of the agreement, he said.

The VPA is to enable legally-sourced Malaysian timber to enter the EU market under Europe's forest law enforcement, governance and trade action plan - aimed to combat illegal logging.

The first round of talks was held in Miri in January.

Awang Tengah said Sarawak aims to be a model state in sustainable management and conservation of forests.

He added that the state government had targeted one million hectares to be set aside as totally protected areas, which would eventually cover 29 national parks, six nature reserves and four wildlife sanctuaries.

"It will include the Santubong National Park, which was recently approved by the state government," he added.