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# Banking on Tongkat Ali's popularity

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Think Tongkat Ali, think Malaysia.

Banking on Tongkat Ali's popularity, the government is working to make it synonymous with the country in the same vein as ginseng and green tea is to Korea and Japan respectively.

Natural Resources and Environment Minister Datuk Seri Douglas Uggah Embas said he was confident that the herb was unique and endemic to Malaysia and could be turned into a flagship product.

"I hope the Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM) can focus on strengthening the development of Tongkat Ali and other herbs like *mi-sai kucing* and *kayu manis*."

"We must learn from Korea's and Japan's success story. Our herb industry has huge potential," he said in a speech read by his deputy, Tan Sri Joseph Kurup, at the launch of the Medicinal and Aromatic Plants seminar in FRIM yesterday.

Also present was FRIM director-general Datuk Dr Abd Latif Mohmod.

Later at a press conference, Ku-

rup said annual exports of the Tongkat Ali, or *Eurycoma longifolia*, amounted to RM100 million.

The local herbal market, meanwhile, is worth RM10 billion.

The United States and South Korea were the two major importers of Tongkat Ali.

"We want to add value to Tongkat Ali so people will automatically relate it to Malaysia."

Meanwhile, Latif said the institute for the past year had been collaborating with a private firm to grow more Tongkat Ali and ensure uniformity in terms of quality to meet market demands.

The laboratory-produced Tongkat Ali can be harvested within several years and will contain thrice the nutrients then the wild herbs.

This, he said, would help with the conservation of the species without compromising on its quality.

"It is getting more difficult to find Tongkat Ali in the wild.

"A lab will not only save a lot of money and time, but will prevent us from over-harvesting the plant," he said.