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Madius urged for FRIM unit on Acacia, not branch

PUTRAJAYA: Federal Science, Technology and Innovation Minister, Datuk Seri Madius Tangau has never suggested that the Forest Research Institute of Malaysia (FRIM) set up its branch in Sabah.

"After studying the report in the *Daily Express* on Nov 13, I found nowhere it was mentioned that Tangau has made such a suggestion that necessitates a vehement response from the State Forestry Director.

"In his off-the-cuff speech, the Minister has only suggested for FRIM to set up a division that specialises in looking after Acacia Mangium within the ambit of the institute. "He never made the call for FRIM to set up a branch in Sabah," said Tangau's Press Secretary, Chris Maskilone in a statement, Tuesday.

Madius' rationale in making this suggestion was due to the huge acreage of Acacia Mangium plantation in Sabah at 63,980 hectares or about 26.8 per cent of the plantation forest in the State, while in Sarawak the total acacia plantations is 236,936 hectares.

"With such a huge acreage, he believed it was only apt that a dedicated division be set up within FRIM to provide assistance should anything happened, endangering the entire acacia plantation," he said.

"The Minister specifically mentioned FRIM as the Deputy Director-General Dr

Rahim Sudin was also in the audience when opening the "Technology Transfer Workshop on value-adding the Acacia Lumber from Sabah - A Community Project by STIA funded by Mosti."

At the same time, the Minister pointed out the shortage of raw material scenario for the Acacia Mangium furniture industry because all the acacias planted in Sabah were being turned into pulp, leaving nothing to them.

"Madius is in the know about these issues since he was the former chairman of the Malaysian Timber Industry Board and he regretted that an innocent proposal to assist the local furniture manufacturers had been spun into a political issue," Maskilone said.

"The Minister agreed to be the guest-of-honour at the event organised by Sabah Timber Industries Association (STIA) at Promenade Hotel because his Ministry had funded the project under the Community Innovation Fund (CIF) leading to the preparation of the Drying Manual and Standard Operating Procedure, which was actually helping the industry in Sabah," he added.

A letter was also being sent to the State Forestry Director, Datuk Sam Mannan and carbon-copied to the Chief Minister, FRIM and STIA on the matter, said Maskilone.