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

“After studying the report in a local newspaper on Nov 13, 2015, I found nowhere was it mentioned that the minister 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 the minister’s press secretary, Chris Maskilone in a statement here yesterday.

Madius’ rationale in making

this suggestion was due to the huge acreage of Acacia Mangium plantation in Sabah - 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 in case something that can endanger the entire acacia plantation happens,” he said.

The minister specifically mentioned FRIM as the deputy director-general Dr Rahim Sudin was also in the audience during the opening of 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 also spoke about the shortage of

raw material for the Acacia Mangium furniture industry as all the acacias planted in Sabah were being turned into pulp leaving nothing for the industry.

“Madius knows 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,” Chris said.

The minister agreed to be the guest-of-honour at the event organised by Sabah Timber Industries Association (STIA) at a hotel here because his ministry had funded it 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.