

Adianto P. Simamora, The Jakarta Post, Jakarta | Sat, 11/13/2010 11:54 AM | National

A packaging company in Tangerang is taking the unusual challenge of running a different business by using cassava and biodegradable plastic to produce environmentally friendly plastic bags.

With the two components, the company claims its plastic bags take less than two years to degrade, compared to at the 500 years required for conventional plastic to degrade.

One year after its began operating, the company has started supplying plastic bags to 40 shopping centers in Greater Jakarta.

The Environment Ministry has categorized such plastic bags as eco-friendly products needed to balance economic growth and environmental protection.

Environment Minister Gusti Muhammad Hatta said producing environmentally friendly products was crucial to meeting sustainable development. "A change in our consumption and production habits is needed," Gusti said Friday.

There is general scientific consensus that massive combustion of coal-based fuels is the main cause of climate change, leading to extreme changes in weather patterns and increased frequency of environmental disasters.

The ministry is prioritizing an eco-friendly economy as a mainstream issue to push sustainable production and consumption.

Gusti said the development of a green economy would allow for seamless relations between social, environmental and economic affairs.

"It means that future economic growth in Indonesia should not be focused on models that exploits natural resources and the environment," he said.

The ministry proposed developing ecotourism to profit from the country's rainforests. Carbon trading was also another option, Gusti said.

The government could promote the use of renewable energy such as photovoltaic cells or turning waste into energy sources, he added.

A study by the ministry showed that developing the country's green economy would create new

jobs that could help eradicate poverty.

The 2009 study said that a 25 percent increase in energy efficiency, 50 percent reduction in the use of coal-based fuels and 10 percent reduction in deforestation would create three million new jobs and raise four million more people out of poverty.

“We want benefits from environmental resources such as forests,” Gusti said at the soft launch of the 10th Asia Pacific Roundtable for Sustainable Consumption and Production conference.

participants from 36 countries at the conference, which is scheduled to be held next year in Yogyakarta, will discuss ways to produce goods using cleaner production techniques more efficiently and with minimum waste.

Deputy minister for the development of environmental technical means and capacity building, Henry Bastaman, said the ministry promoted policies incentivizing companies that implemented sustainable consumption and production methods.

“The incentives include soft loans for industries or import duty exemptions,” he said.