

Field tests for palm oil diesel

By SOH ENG LIM

MANY of the world's major makers of diesel engines have agreed to help Malaysia carry out exhaustive field trials to assess the suitability of palm diesel as a motor fuel.

Announcing this during the historic joint launching of two palm oil projects in Bangi, near Kajang on Saturday, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad thanked the companies for volunteering to take part in the tests.

The promising response of the engine makers reflects their confidence and the high expectations they place on palm diesel as engine fuel, he said.

Although Dr Mahathir did not identify the engine makers concerned, an official source gave an impressive list of names.

These range from Daimler Benz, Volvo and Hino at one end, to Yanmar, and MAN Kirlos-

kar/Inmaco at the other end.

Affirming that the parent firms concerned as well as their local agents will be involved in the field trials, the source stressed that the aim of the project is "to assess the suitability of palm diesel as a fuel for diesel engines."

"If the results prove positive, the respective engine makers will include palm diesel as one of the fuels for their engines in their warranty," the source explained.

In his speech, Dr Mahathir said no less than 200 diesel-powered engines and vehicles will be involved in the trials.

As required by the engine manufacturers, the relevant machines involved in the trials will run for a minimum two years or (in the case of vehicles) cover a distance of at least 300,000 km (186,000 miles) solely on palm diesel.

Pointing out that the trials will involve motor boats, tractors and locomotives as well as road vehicles and water pumps, Dr Mahathir explained that the commencement of the new project has been made possible with the commissioning of the palm diesel pilot plant from Oct. 15.

The head of the Palm Oil Research Institute of Malaysia (Porim), Tan Sri Dr Anuwar Mahmud said palm diesel represented only the beginning of things to come.

In his welcoming address, Tan Sri Dr Anuwar said that the 140-odd scientific projects that Porim is currently working on include basic research into the splitting of palm oil to produce substitute petrol and feedstock for the production of lubricating oils.

The ultimate aim is to maximise the use of palm oil in all possible ways so that it can find a

wide and varied market in competition with the other fats and oils in edible as well as edible applications.

The first of its kind in the world, Porim's newly-launched palm diesel pilot plant is designed to convert palm stearin and other low-value palm oil into palm diesel.

Unlike the laboratory-scale and mini-pilot plants which Porim built earlier, the new plant at Bangi can produce palm diesel on a continuous basis, just like an ordinary commercial plant.

Allowed to run continuously for five days each week, the fully-automated plant can produce 3,000 tonnes of palm diesel a year for use in the field trials.

When required, the plant can be adapted to convert other low-value products of the palm oil industry (e.g. sludge oil

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and palm fatty acid distillate) into palm diesel.

Funded by Petronas, the entire palm diesel pilot plant project will cost a total of \$11.7 million, including \$2.9 million to build the plant from scratch, and the cost of the field trials.

As Dr Mahathir summed up, the launching of the pilot plant project marks a turning point in Malaysia's development and progress as a nation.

"It not only marks a historic advance in the march of research and development in Malaysia but also holds important overall implications for the pursuit of political and economic resilience as well as for speeding up the country's industrialisation programme itself," he said.

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