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Special Report

SIRIM FOCUSES ON ROLE IN LIGHT AIRCRAFT INDUSTRY

By: MOHD NASIR YUSOF

SHAH ALAM - SIRIM is one of the corporate entities that is pro-active, focussing on new researches that could push the country into the high technology age in line with Vision 2020.

As a research organisation, Sirim is now giving special attention to two particular areas -- composite materials for the fuselage of helicopters and advance manufacturing involving the use of robotics and "artificial intelligence".

President of Sirim Berhad Dr Mohd Ariffin Haji Aton said the ability to master these two areas would be among the factors to decide on the direction of the country's industrialisation process to realise the national aspiration of becoming a developed nation by the year 2020.

"Through these researches, the basis of which is being strengthened now, the government-owned company will have a greater impact on the progress of the country's industrialisation," said Ariffin in an interview to mark his first 100 days at the helm of SIRIM as well as the first 100 days that the Standard Industrial Research Institute of Malaysia was corporatised, on Dec 9.

"We have the facilities, equipment and expertise...what we are doing now is that re-engineer the structure of the research units available," he said.

"Composite materials, for example, have the special interest of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad," he said, pointing to the link between the materials with the nation's aspiration to build light aircraft.

On the other hand, advance manufacturing that relies heavily on artificial intelligence and robotics, would not only assist in the modernisation of the manufacturing sector but also overcome the shortage of labour.

Through advance manufacturing, the efficiency and precision of the manufacturing sector would ensure the quality of the products and the time taken to make them.

"We have chosen these two areas from several other specialised fields for particular emphasis through research projects which we believe, would have more significant effects on the nation's industrialisation," he said.

All this while Sirim, he said, is more well-known as an organisation dealing with standards rather than an industrial research institute even though it has all the facilities and expertise for that purpose.

"Sirim is capable of becoming a research centre of excellence with all these facilities and equipment -- backed by some 500 research scientists," he said.

Ariffin said prior to this new move, the research units of Sirim were slightly fragmented in their researches, not focussing on major projects that would have the greatest impact.

"We are now re-engineering these units to undertake major projects... for example, we have the know-how in ceramics, polymers and metals which we will harness into a big project on composite materials," he said.

On Sirim as a corporate entity, he said all the institute's staff were indeed "excited" and they were all well aware that the success and future of Sirim depended on their commitment.

"In my first 100 days here, I have driven home this point to the staff, that every personnel has a stake in the company and that every personnel decides on its future," he added.

The management of Sirim, he said, is currently working on a more conducive working environment. "In Sirim's context, this means creating a bigger challenge in research for them ... which will get rid of any boredom ...and open up more challenging fields," he added.

On the role of Sirim, an institute also better known for expediting the transfer of technology, Ariffin said the organisation would continue with that task with special emphasis on small and medium scale industries (SMIs) which are still in need of new technology to expand their operations.

He also said the corporatisation of Sirim did not mean that its fees and charges levied by the institute for its services would be hiked up because Sirim is not a profit-making organisation.

"We are not a profit-making company.... but that does not mean that we are a non-profit company because we have to recover our costs," he said.

Ariffin, 51, who holds a Ph.D in chemical engineering from Leeds University, was managing director and chief executive officer of Petronas' Research and Scientific Services Sdn Bhd before joining Sirim.

He took over Sirim from Datuk Dr Ahmad Tajuddin Ali, who was appointed the new CEO of Tenaga Nasional Berhad. -- Bernama

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