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JTOP to develop bio-tech park in Johor

Lokman Mansor

JOHOR Tenggara Oil Palm Bhd (JTOP) has signed a business cooperation agreement with Teknik Segar Sdn Bhd to jointly promote and develop a biotechnology park at Ladang Sisek in Kota Tinggi, Johor.

The signing ceremony on Saturday was witnessed by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who was on a two-day official visit to the State.

The park will be a test bed for biotechnology research in the country, according to a company statement.

The park will feature among others, a Biotechnology Science Park which will include a Biotechnology Institute, research laboratories and experimental farms. There will also be a Biotechnology City to accommodate scientists, researchers, students and workers, as well as a Biotechnology Theme Park, the statement said.

Local and foreign companies with high research and development (R & D) commitment will be encouraged and invited to establish their R & D units in the park.

It is expected to contribute significantly to R & D in tropical plants and therefore increase food production in Malaysia. It will also lead to greater private sector funding to R & D.

JTOP also expects the project to be commercially viable given the demand for better and more crops in the country and the region in the future.

At the same function, Dr Mahathir also officially opened, via multimedia, the Sungai Johor Water Treatment Plant in Kota Tinggi, one of two plants constructed by Equiventures Sdn Bhd under the State's water supply privatization project.

Equiventures is investing RM800 million until 2001 in the Sungai Johor and Sungai Layang plants, which supply 370 million litres of water daily or 80 per cent of the Johor Baru district's daily requirement.

Prior to the launch, the Prime Minister also witnessed the signing of a memorandum of understanding for RM4 million worth of R & D between Equiventures, its technical partner Suez Lyonnaise des Eaux and Universiti Teknologi Malaysia.

The research programme will address three key areas of water resource management: reservoir management, treatment of eutrophic water and enhanced clarification focusing specifically on the Sungai Johor plant.

The two-year research programme (1998-1999) is spearheaded by the Asia Pacific Technology & Research Network (Astran), a recently launched network of research centres for Lyonnaise des Eaux in Asia.

The control and prevention of large scale algae blooms is the primary goal of the reservoir management research study. Several methods will be studied to control eutrophication or the formation of algae.

The treatment of eutrophic water research programme meanwhile, seeks to define best practices to treat algae-rich water to maintain high quality treated drinking water while at the same time keeping costs down.

The enhanced clarification project aims to meet consumer needs by achieving very low turbidity, a guarantee of microbiological quality and disinfection efficiency.

Dr Mahathir also witnessed the presentation of MS ISO 9002 to Equiventures by the Standards and Industrial Research Institute of Malaysia (Sirim), making it the first water operator in Malaysia to be given such a certification.

Equiventures was awarded a 20-year concession in June 1992 to supply potable water to the Johor Baru district, which currently has a population of over one million. It has so far invested RM600 million in infrastructure and facilities, with another commitment of RM200 million by the year 2001.

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