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Tulips successfully grown here through genetic engineering

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Universiti Putra Malaysia researchers have successfully grown tulips under local conditions using genetic engineering and biotechnological techniques.

Science, Technology and Environment Minister Datuk Law Hieng Ding said the project initiated last year by Dr Thorihah Lee and Professor Marziah Mahmood was funded by the Intensification of Research in Priority Areas programme.

(IRPA encourages researchers in public research institutes and universities to carry out research and development in critical areas including biotechnology.)

Speaking after the Cabinet meeting yesterday, Law said the project could benefit the local floriculture industry with the creation of new and exotic crops.

"The project has great potential. We can meet local demands and save on foreign exchange since the country spends a huge sum on imports.

"Furthermore, we can earn additional income by exporting the flowers. Tulips rank number one worldwide as the ornamental bulb flower," he said.

This is a biotechnology project identified by the National Biotechnology Directorate to develop tulips that can grow under Malaysian weather and soil conditions.

At present, Law said the project was being carried out in a controlled environment at the university. The flowers were grown in three colours - white, yellow and red.

In the first experiment with potted tulips, the researchers found that commercial production of tulips in Malaysia was possible through the use of suitable cultivars and precise temperature control.

Law said the researchers hoped to commercialise the tulips in two years.

"They need to fine-tune their research first," he said when asked why it would take such a long time for commercialisation.

Law said the researchers presented a bouquet of the tulips to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad this morning.

(END)