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Morni a model for fishermen

Raynore Mering

THIS year's winner of the nation's top fisherman award Nelayan Jaya Peringkat Kebangsaan Tahun 2000, Morni Saibi, 39, has been hooked on fishing since he was 12.

Morni comes from a small fishing village, Kampung Masjid Baru, in Oya, a sub-district of Dalat, Sarawak, and is the fifth among 11 siblings.

By the time he completed Form Five, he knew his way around a fishing boat well enough for his father to entrust him with a trawler of his own and since then, he had taken his career to greater heights.

Today, Morni is the proud owner of two fishing vessels, chairman of several associations including the Oya Fishermen's Association and more importantly, he is the first from Sarawak to win the top fishermen's award.

The award was presented to him by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at the recent Malaysian Agricultural, Horticultural and AgroTourism Show 2000 in Kuala Lumpur.

Morni, who has never won any other awards before, is a firm believer in the use of modern technology in the fishing industry and this is probably the thing that sets him apart from other fishermen in his village.

Morni, in an interview at Kampung Senau, near Kampung Masjid Baru, says he hopes his latest boat, of which he is overseeing the construction, would become the most high-tech boat in Oya.

"We have to change and use new methods of fishing. We cannot be contented with the old ways if we want to be competitive and earn a better living," adds Morni, who has six children.

Morni's knowledge about fishing is a result of the many books and magazines he has read and the information he obtained from the Internet.

He claims to be responsible for introducing the trawler winch and Thai nets to fishermen in his village.

Both his boats are equipped with trawler winches, costing about RM7,000 each.

Morni says the winch is a great improvement from the manual way of fishing. What was once a gruelling five-hour physical ordeal, now takes him only about two hours to reel in his nets.

The Thai nets, costing about RM1,000 each, is strong and will not entangle easily in stormy seas, thus allowing him to go fishing in some of the worst weather. It has also allowed him to venture into deep-sea fishing.

Morni is very excited about his new trawler which he says would be the model boat for other fishermen in Oya because it will be equipped with modern fishing equipment such as the echo sounder, radar and Global Positioning System which amounts to thousands of ringgit.

He feels that fishermen who are serious in the business should not hesitate about investing in modern equipment which "would improve our catch and make the fishing industry much safer".

The echo sounder is to help him to locate schools of fish while the Global Positioning System will help him to find out his location when he is out at sea.

Morni says fishermen must be receptive to changes and be ready to adapt to new technology in order to survive.

He expects the new boat to be ready by Aug 31.

Unlike many fishermen, Morni goes out to sea every month of the year for

a duration of about 15 to 20 days each month.

"Fishermen who met me in Kuala Lumpur were surprised that I fish throughout the year, but they don't realise that they will make more money because no one else wants to go to sea.

"Furthermore, with the technology that is available, the fishing industry does not have to be as risky as before."

Morni says his boats can each haul in about 1,000 kilogrammes of fish each time out at sea and his income is between RM200,000 and RM300,000 a year.

Morni does not depend on government subsidies and financial assistance because he feels that there are others who need it.

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