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Mardi aims to be international player

Zaidi Isham Ismail

THE Malaysian Agricultural Research and Development Institute (Mardi), scoring numerous achievements since its inception 30 years ago, is not about to rest on its laurels and stay content.

Its director-general, Dr Saharan Anang, said Mardi has yet to be at par with other international research organisations such as those in the UK, the US and Japan.

"It took about 50 years for research institutes of developed countries to be where they are. Mardi activities started less than 10 years ago," he told Business Times in an exclusive interview at his office in Serdang, Selangor last week.

Mardi yesterday celebrated its 30th anniversary. The celebration was launched by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at its Serdang headquarters.

It will hold, from April 5, talks and exhibitions at its headquarters to showcase products developed by the private sector which has benefitted from Mardi's achievements.

Today, Mardi has a total of 32 branches or stations nationwide with 3200 staffs, out of which 423 are researchers. Mardi also has an overseas station in Mali, Africa.

Mardi takes pride in being the leading research institute of the country's food, poultry and agricultural sectors. It conducts research to enhance quality, gain and disseminate knowledge and guidelines to other sectors of the economy.

"We have all the expertise and state-of-the-art equipment to conduct research which are at par with other leading research institutes in the world," said Saharan.

Saharan, 53, is the eighth director-general of Mardi. He assumed his post last year in March and is a veteran of the institute since starting his career 31 years ago.

"Let's not forget, Mardi has been doing all the research works prior to the formation of the Palm Oil Research Institute of Malaysia (Porim). Porim only took helm of palm oil research works in the late 1970s.

"The same goes with the Department of Fisheries, which was formed in 1979, and the Malaysian Cocoa Board (formed in 1986). And most of the staffs are ex-Mardi employees," he added.

Prior to the formation of both the Government departments, most of the technologies were produced by Mardi.

Mardi was the pioneer in cocoa fermentation techniques, cocoa sweat, cocoa spread and various research works on fish-rearing such as fish balls, fish-drying, carp-rearing and other technological advancements.

About 95 per cent of rice and padi cultivation uses Mardi techniques and seeds.

Currently, Mardi is seriously concentrating in developing new technologies on horticulture.

"Mardi would also like to diversify into rearing of ostrich, rabbit and turkey for their meat on a national scale," said Saharan.

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