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ROYAL MINT-GLOBAL

ROYAL MINT OF MALAYSIA ASPIRES TO BE GLOBAL COIN MINTER

By: Mohd Arshi Daud

KUALA LUMPUR, May 19 (Bernama) -- The relatively tiny office of Datuk Megat Mohamed Abdul Wahab Megat Abu Bakar at the Royal Mint of Malaysia is so cramped with designs, samples and other materials that even Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamed found it hard to believe during his visit there sometime back.

But it was in this small eight-by-eight ft room that the towering figure of Megat Mohamed, managing director of Malaysia's sole minter of coins and medallions, set ambitious goals for his company, and perhaps the nation.

In 2000, he took the Royal Mint of Malaysia (then known as just Kilang Wang) private from its former owner, Bank Negara Malaysia.

For Megat Mohamed, it was not just a case of a change in ownership: he wants to add value to his acquisition by turning Royal Mint of Malaysia into a respectable global coin minter.

Saying that he drew this inspiration from ideas mooted by Dr Mahathir himself, Megat Mohamed also describes the prime minister the company's strongest supporter.

In an interview with Bernama recently, Megat Mohamed said his aspiration is to see Royal Mint of Malaysia becoming the pride of the nation one day, just as Petronas has carved its named internationally in the field of oil and gas.

He set the company on the road towards this noble target by modernising the operations and effecting a name change to reflect its global outlook.

"Following an investment of RM16 million in the first six months, we have raised our production capacity to close to 1.2 billion pieces a year (from 400 million pieces before it was privatised)," said Megat Mohamed.

The company, which obtained ISO 9001 certification from Moody's International last year, now produces coins, including commemorative coins and gold bullions at quality standards at par with foreign minters with a longer history dating back 800 to 1,000 years ago.

Royal Mint of Malaysia, he said, is now able to offer expertise in high quality coin minting to not only countries in South East Asia but also West Asia.

Negotiations had been held for the production of commemorative coins for Brunei and Indonesia but plans for a similar project in Bahrain have been put on hold because of the war in Iraq.

Talks with the Vietnamese government, which requested Royal Mint of Malaysia to produce blank and minted coins for the country, are expected to resume in one or two weeks after some delays due to the outbreak of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS).

Royal Mint of Malaysia also makes blank coins after a RM20 million investment, making it the second minter in Asia after South Korea to be able to do so. By the end of this year, Royal Mint of Malaysia would be self-sufficient in blank coins without having to import them as the RM20 million investment has enabled it to produce 2.0 billion pieces of blank coins annually..

Megat Mohamed said Royal Mint of Malaysia does not expect problems in meeting overseas demand as the requirement for coins in circulation in Malaysia stands at 600,000 to 700,000 pieces per year.

"My only problem is time as everything must be done fast but when we want to start something, bureaucratic red tape (sometimes) creeps in," he

said.

He revealed that Royal Mint of Malaysia has now been transformed into a full-fledged coin minter as it undertakes its own research and development (R&D).

Recalling his venture into coin minting, Megat Mohamed said it was a natural progression after spending 27 years on his first flagship company, Mariwasa Kraftangan Sdn Bhd.

Mariwasa, the largest user of silver in Malaysia, is the market leader in the production of medals and other metal handicraft in Malaysia.

He said Mariwasa's business of making meritorious awards and medals was similar to that of coin minting.

"The only difference lies in the quantity of production, dies and machines," he explained.

On Royal Mint of Malaysia's production of commemorative coins, Megat Mohamed said it had rekindled interest in numismatics locally.

"The market for numismatic coins has been rather bleak close to a decade before Royal Mint of Malaysia came out with commemorative coins," he claimed.

But now, under the Coin in Education (CIE) programme alone, the company produces 30,000 pieces of thematic coins per month as part of measures to promote coin appreciation and to inculcate coin collecting among school children in the country.

To keep this interest alive, Megat Mohamed disclosed that Royal Mint of Malaysia plans to launch website to enable coin collectors, including international enthusiasts, to list their collections, and trade them over the Internet. -- BERNAMA

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