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## Ariffin sets high standards

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FOR a man who is qualified, competent and has the calibre to lead Sirim Bhd to greater heights, it comes as no surprise to many that the Government had extended the contract of its president and chief executive officer Datuk Dr Ariffin Aton by another two years, starting Sept 1.

The extension, which will end on Aug 31, 2005, was agreed to by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who is also the Finance Minister.

The move will give Ariffin time to get involved in projects he initiated during the Seventh Malaysia Plan (SMP) and complete them.

"I will be able to see the projects, infrastructure and other facilities, completed before my term ends," said Ariffin, who was the Petronas Research and Scientific Services Sdn Bhd managing director and chief executive officer before being appointed the president/CEO of Sirim Bhd when it was corporatised on Sept 1, 1996.

"I was initially appointed on a three-year contract and upon completion, my term was extended for two years and subsequently another two years. The post is a challenge for me and I intend to fulfil our leaders' dreams for Sirim Bhd," said Ariffin, a chemical engineer.

Sirim Bhd, which celebrates its seventh anniversary as a corporatised body, has seen many achievements in research and industrial development, although there were a few pitfalls at the beginning.

The corporatisation has not only brought work culture changes among the over 1,300 staff but it has also carved a niche as a reputable organisation able to serve all sectors of the industry, with focus on small- and medium-scale enterprises.

Being proactive in its approach, Sirim, which has some 600 scientists and researchers, works closely and in tandem with the industry to bring synergy to its operations.

One of the first things that he looked into was improving the management system of the then Standard and Industrial Research Institute Malaysia, a statutory body.

"Most of the things was laid out for us. All that was needed was a few modifications to suit our operation. It should not be forgotten that Sirim was very much Government-driven. Because it was corporatised, it required us to have a thorough relook at some of the systems."

He said he established various levels of authority for a clear demarcation and accountability of various entities in Sirim.

"Once the corporate governance was put in place, I also established a Human Resource System with the help of consultants and eventually came up with a Performance and Development Appraisal System," he said.

"When it was corporatised, the major requirement was to do the plan from A to Z and plan for funding required from the Government and other sources," he said.

"In the last seven years, I tried to introduce ways to change the mindset of my senior managers from that of administrators to that of management. This is because prior to corporatisation most of the management staff were just doing administration."

He said he had to introduce tools that would help facilitate this work culture change for Sirim to survive and play the role as a corporate body.

He also helped set up Sirim Bhd's internal audit with help from the Accountant General and a transparent procurement system. Feedback received over the past two years has been positive. Observers feel that most of the

Sirim staff are more professional now.

"The business circle has seen a radical change, in the sense that we are more concerned with delivery, in terms of quality and time-liness," he said.

All of Sirim Bhd's departments, divisions and units have the ISO certification and this has indirectly helped the staff to upgrade their performance.

He plans to give more emphasis on industrial research to help small- and medium-scale industry entrepreneurs.

"Our mission is to enhance our customers' competitiveness through technology and quality and to fulfil the needs of the shareholders," said Ariffin, who was a former Fulbright scholar and holds a doctorate degree in chemical engineering from the University of Leeds, United Kingdom.

Sirim's contributions to the industrial development and economic growth of the country have been recognised, not only by the Government but also by the private sector and international organisations.

It won, among others, the Efficiency Service Award from the Malaysian Administrative Modernisation and Manpower Planning Unit or Mampu (1996), Public Services Special Award for Performance Measurement (1996), Public Services Special Award (1995) for Information Technology Management, Asian Management Awards (Development Management Category) from the Asian Institute of Management (1995) and Public Services Special Award 1994 for Financial Management.