

R&D to increase income from sago, says Abang Johari



DEVELOPING SAGO INDUSTRY: Abang Johari (third left) with (from left) Dr Kopli, Dr Khairuddin and Dr Hatta after the launching ceremony.

KOTA SAMARAHAN: Housing and Urban Development Minister Datuk Amar Abang Johari Tun Openg is optimistic that sago can be a significant export commodity for the state.

"I believe that the income from export of sago can be increased through value added products, and in view of this the government welcomes inputs to assist in research and development (R&D) of the commodity," he said yesterday.

Speaking when launching Centre of Excellence for Research in Sago Palm (CoESAR) at Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas) campus, here, Abang Johari noted that Sago had long been an important commodity to the state.

He stressed that sago industry can be developed to the level of oil palm, through concerted efforts by the government, intellec-

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tuals and researchers.

The minister was glad to note the commitment of Unimas, which had undertaken R&D on sago since 1993, adding that such effort by the university would complement the development of Sarawak Corridor of Renewable Energy (SCORE).

According to him, the state was committed in developing a sustainable sago industry as can be seen with the large scale planting of the commodity in Mukah since ten years ago.

He congratulated Unimas which had won accolades

both at national and international levels.

Meanwhile, Unimas vice chancellor Prof Dr Khairuddin Abd Hamid said the state exported around 60,000 to 70,000 tonnes of sago annually with income of US\$10 million.

He said developing sago industry was very important to help contribute towards the economy of the state.

Present at the function were also CoESAR director Prof Dr Kopli Bujang and Unimas director of board of directors Datu Dr Hatta Solhi.

Unimas launches centre for sago palm research

By Jacob Achoi

KOTA SAMARAHAN: Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas) has launched a Centre of Excellence in Sago Palm Research (CoESAR) to intensify research and development (R&D) in the commodity.

Minister of Housing and Urban Development Datuk Amar Abang Johari Tun Openg officiated at the launching.

The centre of excellence enlists the expertise of several researchers from various fields and

departments who have been involved in sago research for almost 10 years.

The centre was funded with various grants such as the Techno-Fund, IRPA and Science Fund grants of the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovations Fund, and from the New Energy Development Organisation (NEDO) of Japan amounting to a total of RM12.9 million.

Kerusi Tun Openg or Sago Chair, which was awarded to Unimas in 1994, supported four research projects amounting to RM197,492 covering the specific areas

of flowering process of sago palm, gene profiling of trunking and non-trunking palms, production of sugars from starch and production of amylase from sago waste.

Amylase is any of a group of proteins found in saliva and pancreatic juice and parts of plants; it helps convert starch to sugar.

The core research of the centre embraces four groups - agronomy, molecular genetics, starch technology, and utilisation and product development. CoESAR aspires to become the world reference centre for sago palm R&D activities.

It also plans to increase the number of research members in both the current research areas and other areas such as economic and social aspects of sago palm.

According to CoESAR director, Prof Dr Kopli Bujang, sago palm is one of the major contributors to the state's economy.

More than 90 per cent of sago planting areas in the country were found in Sarawak and the centre was intended to provide direction and focus towards intensifying research activities on sago palm, he said.