

MoU promises a bright future for sago

KUCHING: Unimas signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with New Century Fermentation Research Co Ltd (NECFER) of Fukuoka Japan to form an industrial partnership in research on sago starch fermentation for large-scale production of ethanol and lactic acid.

One of the most promising developments in the future from the cooperation is the possibility of establishing the first industrial-scale starch fermentation plant in Sarawak by NECFER.

Unimas vice-chancellor Prof Dr Abdul Rashid Abdullah and NECFER chairman Prof Emeritus Ayaaki Ishizaki were the signatories.

In this venture, both institutions will cooperate and collaborate in the establishment of the fermentation parameters and structural set-up.

NECFER is interested to cooperate with Unimas through the

sharing of facilities in the Biochemistry Lab together with equipment supplied or transferred to Unimas.

For more than 10 years, Associate Prof Dr Kopli Bujang from the Faculty of Resource Science and Technology (FRST) and coordinator of the Biochemistry Lab has established long-term research cooperation with the Department of Food Science and Technology, Faculty of Agriculture, Kyushu University, Japan.

This cooperation was based on mutual research in the general area of sago starch fermentation, specifically in production of ethanol and lactic acid.

Explicit details in the fermentation processes for production of ethanol and lactic acid achieved in the Biochemistry Lab in Unimas and the Department of Food Science and Technology in Kyushu University

were established through this earlier cooperation.

The data and results were perfected into commercially viable venture by Prof Ishizaki and his associates at the Fukuoka Bioincubation Centre at Kurume, Kyushu.

These researches were financed by the Japan Society for Promotion of Science (JSPS), New Energy and Industrial Technology Development Organisation (NEDO, Japan) and Unimas fundamental research grants.

The grants contribute greatly to the development of research infrastructure and meeting with collaborators in Japan, Thailand and Indonesia.

Over the years, the Biochemistry Lab received several reciprocal visits from professors and research students from Kyushu University to stay for a period of one or two weeks on each occasion.