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# National biotechnology, bioeconomy development agenda expands to Borneo under BTP

**KOTA MARUDU:** The national biotechnology and bioeconomy development agenda has been expanded to Borneo under the Bioeconomy Transformation Programme (BTP).

Science, Technology and Innovation Minister Datuk Seri Panglima Dr Maximus Ongkili launched the bioeconomy projects for Sabah here yesterday where three documents for collaborations were exchanged. He also announced two bioeconomy projects that will aid in the transformation of the agriculture sector and develop skilled farmers of Kota Marudu where agriculture is the main economic activity.

The documents of collaboration proposals exchanged between Malaysian Biotechnology Corporation (BioTechCorp), an agency of MOSTI, and Rural Development Corporation (KPD) is for the development of high-value natural products found in Sabah such as herbs, spices and aromatic plants (vanilla, ylang ylang and jasmine). It will involve rural farmers who will benefit from increased income through the practice of contract farming and optimised use of agriculture land.

Under the second collaboration proposal between Borneo Scallops Sdn Bhd and Inno Fisheries Sdn Bhd, a joint-venture company will be set up for the breeding and production of scallops through an integrated aquaculture facility, with an es-

timated investment of RM540 million. Technology transfer to Sabah companies and fishermen involved will lead to more scallop farms in Sabah.

The third document is a collaboration sealed between Inno Integrasi Sdn Bhd and Malaysian Palm Oil Board (MPOB) for bio-organic fertiliser developed under the Inno-Works® scheme. This venture is part of the Inno Integrasi Sdn Bhd milestone implementation under the BTP trigger project involving agriculture waste conversion to bio fertiliser through the setting up of an integrated waste treatment plant.

Under this trigger project, two out of 50 Inno-Works® integrated plants are currently operating in Sabah. The total integrated plant is expected to generate 2,260 jobs throughout the country and contribute RM197 million to the Gross National Income (GNI) by 2020, with a RM1 billion investment.

At the event, Ongkili also announced two bioeconomy projects that will be carried out in Kota Marudu – the Petai Belalang Pilot Project by Sabah Green Development Sdn Bhd and the establishment of hybrid rice seed production by RB Biotech Sdn Bhd.

The hybrid rice product is a BTP trigger project and Kota Marudu is one of the paddy planting districts chosen for

planting of the paddy from the Japonica and Indica hybrid.

This hybrid is superior and capable of producing up to 30% more in production than conventional/ inbred paddy. Overall, the RB Biotech Hybrid Rice project will create 496 jobs throughout the country and contribute RM450 million to the GNI by 2020, with an investment of RM22 million.

“This project is hoped to contribute towards the country’s

paddy self-sustainability and food security, apart from increasing the annual income of farmers all over the country by up till RM1.6 billion by 2020,” said Datuk Seri Panglima Dr. Maximus.

MOSTI has given RM23 million in funding, under the Ninth Malaysia Plan, to MARDI and Yayasan Tuanku Sirajuddin / RB Biotech Sdn Bhd to conduct research and development for the production of the Siraj paddy hybrid on a large scale.

“As the third engine of the country’s economic growth, agriculture is an important sector and its transformation must be supported by efficient modern technology towards the development of innovation, research and commercialisation,” Ongkili added.

The event also saw the launching of Syarikat Arus Primajaya’s BioBorneo Innovation tissue culture laboratory situated at the Langkon Commercial Centre. The laboratory will enable Kota Marudu farm-

ers to obtain the MD2 pineapple variety from the ‘Smooth Cayenne’ breed for planting. The pineapple planting will begin with 200 farmers. Each of the farmers, who had undergone a training workshop, received

the MD2 variety plants.

Ongkili also launched the Empurau Flagship Programme that aims to produce 1 million empurau fry by 2015. This programme involves the Agro-Biotechnology Institute, Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT), Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM), Department of Fisheries Malaysia, Sabah Fisheries, Department of Agriculture and LTT Aquaculture Sdn Bhd. The research collaboration will focus on breeding, nutrition and genetic aspects using technology for highly-efficient seed production.

Apart from the bioeconomy related projects, the event also witnessed the Exchange of Documents between the Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM) and Sabah Timber Industries Association (STIA) on the development of truck flooring boards from plantation-grown Acacia in Sabah. This project will help to boost the export performance of value-added timber products in Sabah, in line with the aspiration of the National Timber Industry Policy (NTIP) and also enhance Malaysian status in the supply of timber products from legal and sustainable source.

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Ongkili looking at the pineapple produced by Arus Primajaya Sdn Bhd during the launch of the company's BioBorneo Innovation Laboratory.