

DG: Nuclear science helped create new rice varieties

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KAJANG: Unknown to many, nuclear science is helping ensure Malaysia's food security through the creation of new rice varieties, says Nuklear Malaysia director-general Dr Abdul Rahim Harun.

"For example, nuclear technology has been used to contribute to the creation of the IS21 rice variety," Abdul Rahim said during Nuklear Malaysia's golden anniversary celebration at its headquarters here yesterday.

He also cited that nuclear technology is used in the sterile insect technique (SIT) to create sterile male pests which are subsequently released to lower pest population over time.

On rice production, the IS21 rice seeds were unveiled to Malaysian farmers last November by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob, which is a high quality paddy seed resistant to unpredictable weather changes such as drought and floods.

The Prime Minister had called on Nuklear Malaysia and other related institutions in the agriculture field to come up with rice varieties that could withstand extreme climatic events while also resistant to pests and diseases.

Efforts to develop high-quality seeds here were assisted through input from the International Atomic Energy Agency and the Japan Nuclear Energy Agency, under the auspices of the Asian Forum on Nuclear Cooperation.

Apart from the IS21, Nuklear Malaysia and its partners have been working for the past few years on the IS22 rice variety, which is now awaiting approval from the Agriculture Department for use here.

Meanwhile, Science, Technology and Innovation Minister Datuk Seri Dr Adham Baba, who was the guest of honour at the celebration, said there is a need to dispel the notion that nuclear technology is dangerous or hazardous.

"In fact, nuclear technology is very useful when handled properly.

"There is need to explain to the Malaysian Family in simple language about nuclear's manifold role, not just in agriculture but also in our nation's development," he said.

He lauded Nuklear Malaysia for their achievements in utilising nuclear technology for the benefit of the nation.

Last year, Nuklear Malaysia experts developed non-destructive testing of civil structures when assisting the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in the reconstruction of Beirut, which was rocked by a massive blast at its port in August 2020.

Nuklear Malaysia traces its origins in the early 1970s through the setting up of Tun Dr Ismail Atomic Research Centre (Puspati) and placed under the Prime Minister's Department in 1983 where it was known as the Nuclear Energy Unit.

It was then moved to Mosti in 1990 where it was known as the Nuclear Research Institute of Malaysia before it was rebranded as Nuklear Malaysia in 2006.