

Marcop launched, to bolster Malaysia's mechanisation & automation efforts

KUALA LUMPUR: The government aims to enhance research activities for mechanisation and automation of oil palm plantations with the launch of the Mechanisation and Automation Research Consortium of Oil Palm (Marcop).

Plantation Industries and Commodities Minister Datuk Zuraida Kamaruddin said Marcop's main focus was to address the problem of fresh fruit bunches (FFB) harvesting operations, involving almost 80 per cent of foreign labours.

"Marcop aims to address issues and challenges faced by the oil palm plantation sector, especially its dependence on foreign labour," she said at the official here today.

Zuraida said Marcop would focus on the latest mechanisation and automation technologies within the framework of Industrial Revolution 4.0 (IR 4.0).

Zuraida said Marcop had been mandated to develop technologies and innovations through the sharing of research expertise with the industry, technocrats and academics.

The government has allocated RM30 million through matching grants in the 2021 Budget to support Marcop's activities while the industry contributed RM30 million through cess collected by MPOB.

The total allocation of RM60 million would be utilised by Marcop for research and commercialisation of plantation mechanisation technology.

She said the government had also set a national development roadmap for the next five years under the 12th Malaysia Plan which includes reducing the recruitment of low-skilled foreign workers.

"Several measures have been outlined to create more high-skilled employment opportunities including encouraging the industry to move towards automation and mechanisation."

The ministry, through the Malaysian Palm Oil Board, has started a training programme for youths related to mechanisation to attract local workers to work in plantations.

With the high prices of palm oil, she called on palm oil industry players to invest in technology especially mechanisation and automation as an alternative to the use of foreign labour particularly for harvesting.

"We need to attract young people and even women into this sector. The agricultural sector, including plantations, is a male-dominated sector. IR4.0 technology will liberalise our workforce regardless of gender or age to continue to serve the country," she said.

According to Department of Statistics Malaysia, the labour force participation rate for women was only 55.3 per cent compared to men at 80.6 per cent in 2020.

"This shows that there is a potential of 2.7 million women or 44.7 per cent of women outside the labour market.

"I hope this mechanisation effort can contribute to the government's aspiration to achieve a female labour force participation rate of 59 per cent by 2025," she added.

She said the establishment of Marcop would also increase the use of technology and mechanisation in the plantation sector, by optimising the operational efficiency of harvesting FFB while reducing dependence on foreign labour.

<https://www.nst.com.my/business/2021/11/746400/marcop-launched-bolster-malaysias-mechanisation-automation-efforts>