New Ministry

On 27 March 2004, the Prime Minister, YAB Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, announced his line-up of new cabinet ministers and new ministries. Changes in the administration were made based on fulfilling the promises of the Barisan Nasional manifesto. MPOB is now under the new Ministry of Plantation Industries and Commodities. This, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi disclosed, was to better reflect the responsibility and focus of the Ministry as well as to ensure efficient and effective services.

The Ministry of Plantation Industries and Commodities (MPIC) oversees the development of the plantation and commodity sector covering research and development (R&D), production, processing and marketing in respect of palm oil, rubber, cocoa, pepper, tobacco and timber. The policies and programmes of the Ministry are to foster the orderly development of the plantation and commodity sector, achieve higher value-addition through downstream processing and promote the marketing of commodities, particularly semi-processed and processed. MPIC is headed by the newly appointed Minister, YB Datuk Peter Chin Fah Kui with YB Datuk Anifah Aman as his deputy.

Penilaian Tahap Kecekapan Results

Shrieks of joy were heard along the corridors of the MPOB Head Office on 24 March 2004. Reason – the results of the Penilaian Tahap Kecekapan (PTK) were released that morning. Under the new salary scheme for civil servants, passing the PTK examination is one of the criteria for determining salary increment or promotion. As the shrieks testified, most of the candidates who sat for the examination held last year were successful.

New Division

The Director-General of MPOB, Datuk Dr Yusof Basiron announced the creation of a new Division – the Advanced Oleochemical Technology Division (AOTD) at the 25th Professional and Scientific Group Meeting on 13 April 2004.

Visit

YB Datuk Peter Chin, the new minister of Plantation Industries and Commodities Ministry, made a half-day visit to MPOB Head Office in Bangi on 6 April 2004. Accompanying him were the Secretary-General Dato’ General Moh Tahir, the Deputy Secretary-General I and II, Dato’ Teo Suat Cheng and Dato’ Suboh Moh Yassin respectively, and a number of senior officers from the Ministry. The programme at MPOB included a briefing and discussion with MPOB management, a tour of the complex and introduction to some of the successful products and innovations by MPOB scientists.

Awards

MPOB again made its impact at the 32nd International Exhibition of Inventions, New Techniques and Products, which was held in Geneva, Switzerland from 31 March to 4 April 2004.

The projects on Green and Renewable Low Pour Point Palm Diesel and Harvesting Palm Phytonutrients by Dr Choo Yuen May, Dr Ma Ah Nga, Datuk Dr Yusof Basiron, Cheng Sit Foon, Yung Chee Lian and Harrison Lau Lik Nang received silver medals. A bronze medal went to Zamzuri Ishak for his innovative Flameless Sterilizer.

Besides that, MPOB also received a Special Award from Russia for Significant Contribution to Scientific and Technological Advancement and High Advancement for the project on Harvesting Palm Phytonutrients.

Retirement

30 January saw the retirement of Tn Hj Malek Mansoor, Principal Research Officer of the Techno-Economic Research Unit at Wisma Sawit, Kelana Jaya.

On 28 April, Dr Ariffin Darus retired from his post of Deputy Director-General (R&D) while Dr Ma Ah Ngan, Director of the Engineering and Processing Division is due for retirement on 17 May. The retirement of Dr Ma is also the closing of one chapter in MPOB staff’s history as he is
one of five pioneer Research Officers of the Chemistry and Technology Division of MPOB (then known as PORIM). Both Dr Ariffin and Dr Ma are staying on in MPOB as Senior Research Fellows.

Tn Hj Abdullah Ariffin will also be retiring from his position as Head of the MPOB Regional Office in Giza, Egypt on 23 May after which he will continue as Head on a contract basis.

Appointment

Dr Mohd Basri Wahid assumed the post of Deputy Director-General (R&D), MPOB on 28 April 2004. Dr Basri joined PORIM as a Research Officer in 1982. Until his recent appointment, Dr Basri held the position of Director of the Biology Division, MPOB.

New Pilot Plants

MPOB recently completed the construction of two pilot plants for pre-commercialization trials. The plant for production of novel olein is located at MPOB Head Office while the phenolic plant is sited at the MPOB Labu Experimental Mill at Labu, Negeri Sembilan. The latter is for the production of phenolic antioxidants from the aqueous by-products of milling. Both plants have been commissioned and should be ready for full production by the first half of 2004.

Memorandum of Understanding

On 12 April 2004, MPOB signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Hur Far Engineering Works Sdn Bhd and Synn Palm Oil Sdn Bhd on the Rolek Dynamic Nut Cracker. The MoU assigned MPOB as the owner of the technology and rights of the machine and appointed Hur Far to obtain a patent for the nutcracker. Synn Palm Oil Sdn Bhd is responsible for marketing and maintenance of the machines sold to palm kernel crushers. The machine increases the nut cracking efficiency, producing kernels with lower shell content and subsequently palm kernel cake with less than 5% shell.

HIGHLIGHTS OF CONFERENCES, SEMINARS, MEETINGS AND COURSES

Senior Management Retreat

Senior officers of MPOB, comprising the Director-General, Deputy Director-Generals, Directors, Heads of Unit and Group Leaders attended the retreat to discuss the operational plan for 2004 at Mutia Hotel, Pulau Pinang, 16-18 January 2004.

Degradation and Utilization of Biomass by Microbial Consortium

The public lecture by Dr Yasuo Igarashi, Department of Biotechnology, Tokyo was held on 9 March 2004 in the MPOB Conference Hall.

Programme Advisory Committee Meeting

The annual Programme Advisory Committee (PAC) meeting was held from the 5-9 April 2004. Several pre- and post-PAC meeting events were held in conjunction with this 24th meeting.

The Biology Division commissioned a review/consultancy exercise prior to the PAC meeting, to assess the logistical impact of their transgenic programmed and the resource/timetable implications. The review committee is to provide a more realistic framework for the implementation of awareness programmes for all potential stakeholders which include industrial refiners, food processors and retailers, politicians and policymakers, overseas customers and lobby groups and the general public.

During the PAC meeting, the Product Development and Advisory Services Division also convened a similar review on the nutrition programme carried out by the Product Development and Advisory Services Division. The members of this Ad-Hoc Nutrition Committee were headed by Dr K C Hayes from Brandeis University, USA.

After the three-day deliberation and review on new project proposals and status of on-going projects by the various sub-committees of the PAC, four PAC members and Dr K C Hayes were invited to share their views and information on their respective fields of interest at the PAC Seminar held on 8 April 2004. The five speakers were:

- Dr Soh Aik Chin (Applied Agricultural Research Sdn Bhd) who discussed the difficulty of yield selection in *What You See is Not What You Get!* (selecting the ideal plant);
- Prof Denis J Murphy (School of Applied Sciences, University of Glamorgan, United Kingdom) who reviewed the recent developments in knowledge in plant fatty acid biosynthesis, modification and assembly into complex lipids in his
lecture on *Fatty Acid Biosynthesis in Plants: Elucidation and Manipulation - Past, Present and Future*;

- Thomas Mielke (ISTS Mielke GmbH, Germany) who gave an update on the supply and demand of oils and fats in *Global Supply, Demand and Price Prospects for Oils and Fats*;

- Dr Marcel S F Lie Ken Jie (Department of Chemistry, University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong) who shared his views on the subject of slimming in *Hit the Fat Get Slim*; and

- Prof Dr K C Hayes (Brandeis University, Boston, Massachusetts, USA) gave a presentation on the trans fat story in his delivery on *Why Palm Oil Food Products Make Sense: The Trans Fat Story*.

This year, the annual PAC seminar was attended by 304 participants with 295 attendees from the industry.

**Skill/Competency in Grading of Oil Palm Fruits**

The oil extraction rate (OER) in Malaysian palm oil mills increased from 19.22% in 2001 to 19.91% in 2002. This can be partly attributed to the introduction of the course which increased awareness of the importance of OER and quality of oil palm fruits. Two courses were held in the first quarter of 2004. The first, from 24-26 February, was at Allson Klana Hotel in Nilai, Negeri Sembilan while the second from, 29-31 March was held in Sandakan, Sabah at the Sanbay Hotel.

**Diploma in Palm Oil Milling Technology and Management**

The course was held at MPOB Head Office, Bangi from 8-16 March 2004. It was attended by 44 participants.

**Senior Management Leadership Grooming Programme**

Forty-three senior officers attended the programme which was held from 11-13 March 2004 at the Adelphi Hotel, Seremban. The programme was an opportunity for the attendees to update knowledge on leadership, share leadership experience and to appreciate the importance of leadership transfer.


The one-day course was conducted by Tn Hj Abdul Rahman Dalib of Rahmandalib Consultant & Services Sdn Bhd on 29 March 2004. Under OSHA regulation, it is compulsory for employers to hold safety courses to educate employees on safety and responsibility at the workplace.

**Food Colloids, Rheology and Texture**

The five-day course was held at MPOB Head Office from 12-16 April 2004. The course was conducted by Prof T F Tadros, visiting professor of Imperial College and a PAC member of the Technology and End-Use Sub-Committee.