

SPB to hold first in-house training at new centre

The Star 19 June 2012

KUCHING: Sarawak Plantation Bhd's (SPB) newly set up oil palm training centre in Lambir, Miri, will kick off with an in-house training next month.

Group managing director Datuk Hamden Ahmad said the first batch of trainees would make up of between 30 and 40 field supervisors.

The training is focused on developing their leadership competency.

The group employs over 500 staff and some 3,000 estate workers, about 65% of them Indonesians.

In January this year, SPB entered into a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Citra Widya Education PT, Indonesia's sole privately-owned institution of technical education, which provides specialised training and development of human capital for the oil palm industry.

Hamden said while the company training centre's priority was to train the group's employees and estate workers, it was expected to eventually become a provider of skills training for school leavers to prepare them for jobs in the plantation industry.

"The industry is facing an acute shortage of skilled manpower, especially fruit harvesters, and the situation is expected to worsen due to

the rapid expansion of plantation areas.

"It is reported that between 10% and 15% of fresh fruit bunches (FFBs) in the state have not been harvested and left to rot due to shortage of pickers, thus causing huge economic losses," he said.

Hamden said SPB was short of about 300 estate workers, mainly skilled harvesters.

On the estate mechanisation, he said the majority of the activities like harvesting of FFBs were done manually.

The group has over the years carried out major upgrading of the infrastructure in its estates to cater for mechanisation. The main focus is on infield FFB collection, fertilizer application, mainline transport and weedicide spraying.

As at Dec 31 last year, SPB has a total land bank of nearly 52,000ha, inclusive of 12,900ha under native customary rights (NCR) joint ventures. The total planted areas under oil palm was more than 29,500ha.

Hamden said the group was carrying out new planting on 8,500ha this year in Sri Aman, Sibu-Sarikei and Mukah areas.

"The group has an ambitious target - to increase its oil palm estates to 100,000ha within five years through an aggressive planting programme and possible acquisition."