



P3
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P10
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SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 4, 2010



ONE of the seven fish ponds on Patrick's farm.

>> *Third of a four-part series*

First fully mechanised smallholder rice farm in Sarawak

BY ADELINE LIONG

PATRICK SONG, 44, of Kuching is the first Sarawakian to have a fully mechanised smallholder rice farm in the state. So far, he has already cultivated 70 acres of his farm near Paley Caves in Batu and is looking forward to cultivating all of the 175 acres.

He planned his first rice crop in November last year and harvested them in February this year. Now, he is waiting to harvest his second crop.

Patrick told the *New Sarawak Tribune* at his farm recently that his Basmati rice would be harvested in two weeks' time followed by Sushi rice, and rice and Bajong rice over the next 10 weeks or so.

"Basmati is an Indian species of very fine rice almost like Bario rice. It's very fragrant and most consumers like it. This is my first trial plot," explained Patrick, who is also a director of Ceria Agriculture Services Sdn Bhd, a private contractor which is currently helping rice farmers in Sekudak, Chupak in Siburan to harvest their padi with the help of combine harvesters.

He has also formed Empire Seed



PATRICK and one of his dogs pose beside some Basmati rice plants. PHOTOS: ADELINE LIONG

Production Centre S/B, a joint venture company with Empire Rice Mill based in Selangor, Kuching to produce certified Basmati and other rice seeds for propagation purposes.

He said the parent seeds were

supplied initially by Malaysian Agricultural Research and Development Institute (MARDI) Headquarters in Kuala Lumpur.

As a registered contract farmer to Nestlé, Patrick sells all his rice to the company primarily used for production of baby food, which requires the rice to be produced under very strict health

guidelines.

Patrick also has five hectares of Bajong rice on his farm.

"Bajong, Bario and Birls are the three species of traditional rice internationally patented by



RIPENING Basmati stalks on Patrick's farm.

the Department of Agriculture Sarawak.

"Currently, I am working together with Ceria Agricultural Services and the department of Agriculture. We are trying to commercialise Bajong rice. We hope to promote it to the international markets so that we can help to increase the income, livelihood and living standards of farmers growing this species of rice.

"It is growing well. The weather suits it perfectly. While the Bario rice is already very well commercialised, the Birls rice and Bajong rice still have a long way to go.

"I am keeping Bajong rice which is black rice away from the other rice. I don't want to contaminate my speckled rice," he added.

Patrick explained that the planting of the different varieties of rice was designed in such a way that

there would be staggered ripening and maximised use of the machines.

"If all the rice crops ripen at the same time, there will not be enough labour and machines," he pointed out.

He revealed that he had spent nearly RM1.5 million so far on the land preparation, machines including two units of seven-tonne mechanical tower type padi dryer which dry a total of 14 tonnes of harvested padi in 12 hours regardless of weather conditions, and other incidentals.

"I initially bought most of my machines from Taiwan. When the Sarawak Agriculture Department was confident I was seriously committed to the business, they also shipped in with some equipment."

See page 32



PATRICK on one of his tractors.



SUSHI rice plants on the farm.