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Boosting Sabah cocoa's global competitiveness

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Supporting local growers, Che Murad visits the cocoa farm and seedling nursery belonging to Bidi @ Bideh Bongkok in Kampung Tambiau, Ranau.

Clarence Dol

RANAU: Malaysia's cocoa industry is looking to strengthen its competitiveness in international markets while improving local production, with the Malaysian Cocoa Board (LKM) focusing on sustainability requirements and the development of cocoa-growing facilities in Ranau.

The efforts include discussions with the European Forest Institute (EFI) on Malaysia's preparedness for the European Union Deforestation Regulation (EUDR), alongside a review of the Ranau Highland Cluster Cocoa (RHCC) Complex and visits to local cocoa growers.

LKM director-general Datuk Che Murad Sayang Ramjan visited the RHCC Complex on Oct 27 to assess its facilities, operations and development potential.

During discussions with staff, he stressed the importance of having clear development goals and encouraged them to propose new ideas, think creatively and work together to strengthen the cocoa industry in Ranau.

The visit also took him to Kampung Tambiau, where he inspected the cocoa farm and seedling nursery belonging to Bidi @ Bideh Bongkok, an active grower who has received several recognitions for his involvement in cocoa cultivation.

Che Murad also visited a small-scale cocoa drying facility owned by Macheal Daransuk to observe local practices in bean handling and post-harvest processing.

The visits provided an opportunity to examine conditions at farm level, including nursery development, cultivation practices and the handling of harvested cocoa beans — factors that can influence productivity and product quality.

The local assessment comes as LKM works to strengthen the industry's readiness for changing international market requirements.

At a meeting with EFI at its Kota Kinabalu headquarters on Oct 22, the two sides reviewed a draft EUDR Preparedness Check report, discussed technical feedback and explored possible areas for further cooperation.

The discussions covered supply-chain traceability through the e-Cocoa and Jejak Koko systems, verification of production areas as deforestation-free, regulatory compliance and capacity-building for industry participants.

Proposed technical cooperation included improvements to existing systems, pilot projects and training to help strengthen compliance with EUDR requirements.

The regulation is intended to ensure that certain commodities placed on or exported from the European Union market are not linked to deforestation and forest degradation. Cocoa is among the commodities covered by the regulation.

For Malaysia's cocoa sector, traceability and reliable production records are important in demonstrating where cocoa originates and whether it meets applicable market requirements.

The discussions with EFI involved representatives from LKM, the Ministry of Plantation and Commodities and the international institute, including its global partnerships and Asia regional office teams.

Together, the two initiatives highlight the importance of developing the industry at both ends of the supply chain — supporting growers and improving post-harvest practices while strengthening the systems needed to meet international standards.

LKM said it remained committed to international cooperation to improve the sector's sustainability and competitiveness.

For Ranau's cocoa growers, the broader challenge is to translate these efforts into better productivity, improved quality and stronger opportunities in an increasingly sustainability-conscious global market.

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