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The Malaysian Reserve

Higher appreciation for science after pandemic experience, minister says

This is after scientists having to work closely with decisionmakers in providing scientific input on policies

by S BIRRUNTHA / pic by TMR FILE

THE Covid-19 pandemic resulted in an intense appreciation for science and how it influenced government policy, Science, Technology and Innovation (Mosti) Minister Datuk Seri Dr Adham Baba *(picture)* said. He said people saw how scientists have worked closely with decisionmakers to provide scientific input on policies that affect millions, such as physical distancing, contact tracing, outbreak monitoring systems and management of immunisation programmes.

“One success story of scientists and policymakers working together is the collaboration between Mosti and our agency, the Academy of Sciences Malaysia (ASM).

“Through ASM, the national advisory body for matters related to science, technology and innovation, a network of experts from the academia and the industry is leveraged to gain inputs

and guide evidence-based policy-making which is the highest scientific advisory body of Malaysia," he said at the opening ceremony of South-East Asia Science Advice Network (SEA SAN) in Kuala Lumpur today.

He said Mosti have developed a roadmap for key technology domains including vaccine development, robotics, nanotechnology, hydrogen economics, as well as blockchain technology, and is currently working to develop and implement national policies related to these technology domains together with ASM.

Dr Adham said the concept of "Open Science" unlock solutions to real economic and social challenges through data sharing and highlighting the best practices.

He said this would serve to accelerate solutions at a scale and speed that is unprecedented for the common good.

Additionally, he said it also promotes open collaboration of scientists globally, which will increase the quality and impact of science, through more efficient use of available resources.

"Malaysia also advocates open science, and in 2019, initiated an 'Open Science' initiative through Malaysia Open Science Platform (MOSP).

"MOSP is the data platform that shares unpublished scientific data and datasets, publications and reports produced by Malaysian scientists which promote the visibility of research data collections to encourage their reuse.

"This initiative involves a collaboration of multi-agencies namely Mosti, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia Open Science Alliance and ASM," he noted.

As such, Dr Adham said all Malaysian researchers are encouraged to share research data to the MOSP directory, adhering to the policy and guidelines developed for the MOSP that enables accessibility and sharing of research data aligned to national priorities and international best practices.

He added that the efficient dissemination of scientific findings can bridge the gap between science and policy throughout Asean and globally.

Dr Adham also believes that the strong relationship between Mosti and ASM is a prime example of how a conducive avenue and ecosystem for science advisory practice as well as for decisionmakers to engage with scientists is critical towards enhancing the productivity of the country.

"This has built towards greater confidence and trust on part of the public towards the government's efforts to promote economic development, societal wellbeing and address environmental concerns," he said.

Meanwhile, International Network for Government Science Advice (INGSA) has launched a pilot study, namely SEA SAN, for the sharing of knowledge and experience between senior-level decisionmakers, academics and professionals in the region.

According to INGSA, the importance of evidence-informed policymaking for the mitigation of various social, environmental or economic issues faced by countries worldwide is being highlighted with the Covid-19 pandemic.

Nevertheless, many countries do not have strategic, best-practice workflows for the uptake of scientific evidence for policymaking.

A key feature of the SEA SAN is the policy intelligence platform which serves as an online platform to facilitate collaboration and discussion between network members in real-time.

Five South-East Asian countries — Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam — have been selected for the pilot study of SEA SAN.

It is hoped that SEA SAN will expand to all South-East Asian countries, and become an entrenched regional institution for scientific advice which can be mobilised quickly in case of a transnational crisis in the future.