



PRESS RELEASE

MINISTRY OF SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION

HISTORIC FIRST ELECTION OF A MALAYSIAN SCIENTIST AS A FELLOW OF THE PRESTIGIOUS ROYAL SOCIETY

KUALA LUMPUR, 21 May 2025 – Malaysia proudly marks a historic milestone with the election of Dr Ravigadevi Sambanthamurthi FASc, a Malaysian scientist, as a Fellow of the Royal Society, the world's oldest and most prestigious scientific academy. This represents the first time a Malaysian has been elected to this esteemed body since its founding in 1660. She will be officially inducted into the Society in London on 11 July 2025, where she will sign the Royal Society's historic Charter Book - a record that bears the signatures of scientific luminaries spanning more than three centuries.

A pioneering biotechnologist, Dr Ravigadevi was appointed as Fellow of the Academy of Sciences Malaysia (ASM) in 2010 and is currently the Chair of the Biological, Agricultural and Environmental Sciences Discipline. She is also a Fellow of the World Academy of Sciences. As former Director of the Advanced Biotechnology and Breeding Centre at the Malaysian Palm Oil Board (MPOB), she led transformative research in oil palm biochemistry and genomics. Her innovations have had a global impact, particularly in improving yield, resource efficiency, and environmental sustainability.

One of her most significant achievements was leading the team that decoded the oil palm genome - a major scientific breakthrough published in the prestigious journal *Nature*. This led to the discovery of the *SHELL* gene, which is key in determining oil yield. Thanks to this discovery, DNA testing can now be used to select higher-yielding trees, helping farmers produce more oil with less land and lower environmental impact. She also uncovered the presence of valuable bioactives in palm oil mill effluent, which is traditionally a pollutant. She developed a method to extract these compounds, turning a waste stream into a resource and promoting a circular economy.

Her numerous honours include the Knight of the International Order of Merit of Inventors by the International Federation of Inventors Association in 2009, the Tan Sri Augustine Ong Lifetime Achievement Award for Inventions and Innovations in Oil Palm (2022), and the Intel Environment Laureate distinction from the Tech Museum Award, USA, for "individuals and organisations whose ideas and execution are changing the world."

In response to the honour, Dr Ravigadevi said, “This is a profoundly humbling honour, I see this not as a personal achievement, but as a tribute to the exceptional teams I’ve had the privilege to work with. Scientific progress is never the work of one individual. It is the product of shared vision, dedication, and collaboration. The vibrant research ecosystem at MPOB and our committed collaborators made all of this possible.”

The Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation (MOSTI), YB Tuan Chang Lih Kang, lauded the achievement, stating, “Dr Ravigadevi’s election as the first Malaysian Fellow of the Royal Society is a proud moment for our nation. This recognition is not only a personal triumph but also a symbol of what Malaysia stands for under the Malaysia MADANI framework, a nation that uplifts prosperity through knowledge and champions sustainability through innovation. MOSTI will continue to build an ecosystem that nurtures excellence, accelerates impact, and positions Malaysia as a respected contributor to global science.”

ASM President, Academician Datuk Dr Tengku Mohd Azzman Shariffadeen FASc, said, “On behalf of ASM, we extend our heartfelt congratulations to Dr Ravigadevi for this extraordinary achievement. The inclusion of a Malaysian in this prestigious fellowship signals the increasing impact of Malaysia’s scientific contributions globally. More importantly, Dr Ravigadevi’s research has advanced scientific understanding and brought tangible societal benefits.”

Founded in 1660, the Royal Society counts among its Fellows many of history’s most influential scientists, including Isaac Newton, Charles Darwin, Albert Einstein, and Stephen Hawking. For 2025, more than 90 individuals from countries such as Malaysia, Singapore, South Africa, China and Switzerland have been selected as Fellows of the Royal Society. The Guardian newspaper once quoted this Fellowship as the “equivalent of a lifetime achievement Oscar.” This prestigious honour recognises a scientist’s outstanding contributions to their field and stands as one of the most esteemed accolades in the scientific community.

Her election also holds special meaning for women in science. The Royal Society only began admitting women in 1945, making Dr Ravigadevi’s election particularly significant for the visibility of women. Her recognition stands as a powerful symbol of progress and a beacon of inspiration for young scientists, particularly women and those from developing nations.

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Published by:

MINISTRY OF SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION

21 May 2025





Media Kit: [Dr Ravigadevi - Felo Royal Society](#)

Media enquiries:

Marketing Communication Unit, The Academy of Sciences Malaysia

Najib Mohd Idris

najib@akademisains.gov.my

(+6019 303 7847)