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Indigenous plant extracts hold great promise: DCM

LH CHENG

KUCHING: Sarawak Biodiversity Centre (SBC) has some 20,000 indigenous plant extracts in its collection, many of which have been applied on human cancer cells, from which promising cytotoxic activities have been discovered, says Deputy Chief Minister Datuk Patinggi Tan Sri George Chan.

"We have also 150 indigenous aromatic extracts which have anti-microbial and anti-fungal properties, and which obviously have commercial values in perfumes, soaps and detergents," he said when opening the 4-day Fourth Global Summit on Medicinal and Aromatic Plants here yesterday.

He said it had been a project of the SBC to gather an inventory of indigenous medicinal and aromatic plants from Sarawak's biodiversity to explore their applications as flavours and scents for potential commercialisation in the health care industry.

"The centre works closely with the indigenous communities through its traditional knowledge documentation programme, and from there, it hopes to be able to document some unique plants with interesting properties."

"The goal is essentially to create a value chain from the communities all the way to the market and to see that the benefits flow back to the communities," he said.

Chan, who is also Minister of Tourism and Heritage, said that medicinal plants offered enormous scope for drugs development.

"Since ancient times, plants

have been widely used as drugs, cosmetics and food. We need to create a database of traditional medicinal plants for specific bio-activity."

"I wish therefore to take this

opportunity to mention here that Sarawak has tremendous potential for herbal farming, industry and research," Chan added.

He believed that traditional

medicines were slowly being integrated into modern medicine in the form of dietary and nutritional supplements.

"There is a big demand for organic medicinal plants in the international market, which creates the need for standardisation of organic production technologies," the Deputy Chief Minister said.

He warned against indiscriminate and destructive exploitation of many rare plant species, many of which are on the verge of extinction.

"There is a need to emphasise non-destructive harvesting practices by the active involvement of the local people for sustainable development and conservation of medicinal plants."

Chan held the view that although modern medicine might be available in many countries, traditional medicines have maintained their popularity for historical and cultural reasons.

The potential of traditional medicine and natural therapies could not be over-emphasised as they have been used to alleviate conditions associated with HIV and AIDS, diabetes, malaria and many other serious health conditions.

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CHAN declares open the summit while (from left) Director of UiTM Sarawak Dr Jamil Haji Hamali, Assistant Minister of Environment and Public Health Datuk Peter Nansian, President of 4th Global Summit on Medicinal and Aromatic Plants Dr V. Sivaram, and Chairperson of Century Foundation Dr Anita Menon look on . PHOTO: TH LU

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