INTRODUCTION

Rattan is an anglicized version of the Malay word "rotan" which in Malay means to pare, smoothen or whittle. Rattans are climbing plants derived from the group of palms called Lepidocaryoideae. The plant has been exploited and utilized for centuries in Southeast Asia and the rattan industry today remains a valuable part of the rural life in the region particularly its role in generating employment via activities such as cultivation, extraction, processing and cottage-scale manufacturing. As such they are rated as the most important forest product after timber. Trade in rattan has in the years developed into a multi-million dollar business, but all this while researchers and entrepreneurs have paid comparatively little scientific attention to rattan.

Knowledge of the amount of rattan available is grossly lacking and its exploration is going on in an almost unchecked manner. This could inevitably lead to a serious depletion of the resource. In the last decade however, there was an increasing surge of interest in rattan and rattan products amongst the rattan-producing countries. This is due to the potential for increasing exports and its versatility as finished products. There is an awareness of the important role of rattan in socio-economic development. Opportunities are created for promoting the rattan industry as a labour-intensive, comparatively low capital investment, rural-based industry; with small firms catering to the local furniture market while a few large establishments deal in the export of cane in either their semi-processed or processed state. All these resulted in a move towards an organized

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intensification of research into the various important aspects of rattan cultivation and utilization. Besides the basic studies done on botany, species trials, germination studies, survey methods, silvicultural trials, physical and mechanical tests, research organizations and universities in the region are embarking on other aspects of research viz. regeneration, ecological aspects, tissue culture, production economics, furniture design and improving methods of processing rattan.

Information on existing practices and experiences in the rattan industry of Southeast Asia is available but is scattered in various publications or is unpublished. On account of this, it is desirable for a centre to be formed to collect, store and disseminate all information on the subject to all interested organizations to avoid unnecessary duplication of research.

ESTABLISHMENT

The idea for the setting up of the Rattan Information Centre (RIC) at the Forest Research Institute, Kepong was first mooted by the participants of the Rattan Workshop convened in Singapore in June 1979 by the Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Science Division of IDRC (International Development Research Centre).

The Rattan Information Centre (RIC) was established and started operation in May 1982 at the Forest Research Institute (FRI) central library where the staff and sources of reference are readily available. It is financially supported by IDRC, the grant of which is to be expended over an estimated period of three years.

LOCATION

The F.R.I., Kepong, where the centre is based, is the research unit of the Forestry Department of Peninsular Malaysia under the Ministry of Primary Industries. The basic responsibility of the Institute is to carry out research in forestry and forest products in order to ensure the sound management of the nation's forests and the efficient utilisation of the forest resources. Research on rattan comprised one of the activities of the Institute.
It started in earnest in 1975 but so far research has been confined mainly to studies on the taxonomy, ecology and growth of rattans with a view to developing techniques for the establishment of rattan plantations on a commercial scale.

OBJECTIVES

Generally, the objective of RIC is to "seek, acquire, classify and store all relevant information on rattan and disseminate this information in various forms to those interested". More specifically, the objectives of the centre are:

(i) to build up a comprehensive collection of the rattan literature;
(ii) to set up a document storage and retrieval system;
(iii) to publish a comprehensive annotated bibliography on rattan;
(iv) to translate articles upon request;
(v) to prepare/publish state-of-art reviews and manuals on special topics eg. seedling production concerning rattans, topics to be decided according to priorities identified during the course of the project;
(vi) to perform specific searches on request;
(vii) to make copies of documents available and to disseminate them to interested parties;
(viii) to compile a directory of on-going research projects on rattan in the region, and of organizations conducting research on rattan cultivation and processing, as well as those interested in rattan culture, trade and industry;
(ix) to issue a quarterly newsletter/bulletin on rattan which, among other things, will provide current awareness on all materials, whether documents, articles, books or conference proceedings,
reports, etc. It will also update regularly the directory of on-going research projects on rattan and also profiles of the various research organizations that conduct research on rattan;

(x) to establish contacts among all organizations having interests in the rattan;

(xi) to prepare list of terms/thesaurus relevant to rattan; and

(xii) to prepare/distribute promotional literature on the programs and services of the Rattan Information Centre.

DOCUMENTATION

The library has started a small collection of articles pertaining to rattan and a reading list has also been compiled. At present there are about 160 articles on rattan in the Forest Research Library. The computer printout of the Bibliography on rattan which will be out soon is still in its final stage of editing.

RIC is embarking on a program of obtaining all materials, published or unpublished, to add to the present collection so as to make it as comprehensive as possible in order to fulfil the request of all interested parties. We would therefore like to appeal for a copy of all publications, whether published or unpublished, by your scientist/organization to be forwarded to RIC for documentation and storage. These publications will be abstracted, indexed and disseminated through our quarterly bulletin (R.I.C. Bulletin) as and when they are received. Also, in our efforts to make this bulletin as informative and as interesting as possible, we earnestly request and solicit contributions, whether in the form of articles, comments or news items from all rattan specialists, scientists, agriculturist, agronomists, technologists and organizations which have a special interest in rattan.

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