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SHAH ALAM, MAR. 1 (BERNAMA)--DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER DR. MAHATHIR MOHAMAD ASSURED TODAY THAT THE GOVERNMENT WOULD GIVE EVERY POSSIBLE ASSISTANCE TO THE PRIVATE SECTOR TO SET UP FACTORIES PRODUCING FOODSTUFF.

THIS INCLUDED ESTABLISHMENT OF MORE AGRICULTURAL DISTRICTS AS PASTURE GROUNDS AND ORCHARDS.

THE PRIVATE SECTOR SHOULD ALSO BE ENCOURAGED TO PLANT CROPS FOR PROCESSING INTO FOODSTUFF.

DR. MAHATHIR, WHO IS ALSO EDUCATION MINISTER, SAID THIS WHEN OPENING THE SEMINAR ON DEVELOPMENT OF THE FOOD INDUSTRY IN MALAYSIA ORGANISED BY THE APPLIED SCIENCE STUDIES OF THE MARA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY HERE. THE SPEECH WAS READ BY THE EDUCATION MINISTER SECRETARY-GENERAL DATUK ABDUL KADIR TALIB.

HE SAID THE GOVERNMENT SPENT A LARGE SUM EVERY YEAR ON IMPORTS OF FOODSTUFF FROM ABROAD TO OVERCOME THE LOCAL SHORTAGE WHILE IMPORTERS ALSO IMPORTED PROCESSED FOODSTUFF FOR RETAILING AT HIGH PRICES. --BERNAMA MORE 1235/MD

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IT WAS THEREFORE TIME FOR THE GOVERNMENT TO FOCUS ITS ATTENTION ON DEVELOPING THE POTENTIAL OF LOCAL PRODUCTION OF FOODSTUFF TO MAKE THE COUNTRY SELF-SUFFICIENT IN FOOD AND SAVE ON FOREIGN EXCHANGE.

IN THIS CONNECTION, THE GOVERNMENT HOPED FOR CLOSE COOPERATION FROM THE PRIVATE SECTOR IN SETTING UP MORE MILLS TO PROCESS FOOD AS WELL AS TO GENERATE EMPLOYMENT.

DR. MAHATHIR SUGGESTED THAT LOCAL INDUSTRIALISTS PROCESS FRUITS INTO ITEMS LIKE PRESERVES AND JAMS SO AS TO HAVE SUFFICIENT YEAR-ROUND SUPPLY OF FOOD STUFF.

ANOTHER WAY WAS TO PRESERVE SURPLUS FRUITS DURING SEASON SO AS TO MAKE THEM LAST LONGER.

THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER STRESSED THE GOVERNMENT ALWAYS MONITORED THE LOCAL FOOD MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY TO ENSURE THE QUALITY OF THE PRODUCTS WAS MAINTAINED, WHETHER FOR EXPORT OR DOMESTIC CONSUMPTION. --BERNAMA MORE 1239/MD

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HE EMPHASISED ON THE IMPORTANCE OF INVESTORS STUDYING OR ANALYSING RESEARCH FINDINGS OF FOOD TECHNOLOGISTS TO ENABLE THEM TO IMPROVE THEIR OPERATIONS IN THE OVERALL CONTEXT OF IMPROVING THE NATIONAL ECONOMY.

MIT DIRECTOR, DATUK LOKMAN MUSA, SAID THE MIT WOULD INTENSIFY ITS EFFORTS IN PRODUCING MORE PROFESSIONAL IN FOOD TECHNOLOGY.

IT HAD MADE ALLOCATIONS FOR INSTALLATION OF MORE MODERN EQUIPMENT IN THE SPECIAL LABORATORY FOR THE APPLIED SCIENCE STUDIES COURSE.

THE MIT HOPED TO BUILD A FULLY-EQUIPPED FOOD PROCESSING LABORATORY.

DATUK LOKMAN SAID A NUMBER OF THE FIRST GRADUATES OF THE COURSE HAD BEEN ACCEPTED FOR FURTHER STUDIES TO ENABLE THEM TO PURSUE BACHELOR'S DEGREE IN UNIVERSITIES IN AMERICA.

HE HOPED THE GOVERNMENT WOULD EQUATE THE DIPLOMA GIVEN BY THE COURSE TO A BACHELOR'S DEGREE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

--BERNAMA 1245/MD