

MAHATHIR-TOBACCO

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KOTA BAHARU, MARCH 2 (BERNAMA) — THE NATIONAL TOBACCO BOARD WILL DRAW UP A PLAN TO ENSURE THE PROPER DEVELOPMENT OF THE TOBACCO INDUSTRY, DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER DATUK SERI DR. MAHATHIR MOHAMAD SAID TODAY.

THE PLAN WOULD COVER ALL ASPECTS INCLUDING CULTIVATION, CURING, RESEARCH, TRAINING AND CIGARETTE MANUFACTURING, HE SAID.

DATUK SERI DR. MAHATHIR, WHO IS TRADE AND INDUSTRY MINISTER, SAID THIS IN A SPEECH READ BY PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY ENCIK ABU HASSAN HAJI OMAR AT THE OPENING OF THE MALAYSIAN TOBACCO CURERS ASSOCIATION GENERAL MEETING HERE.

DATUK SERI DR. MAHATHIR SAID THAT THE TOBACCO INDUSTRY WAS EXPERIENCING A DECLINE IN PRODUCTIVITY AT PRESENT.

HE SAID THAT DURING THE 1960S TOBACCO GROWERS WERE ABLE TO OBTAIN 1,000 LB OF DRY LEAF PER ACRE BUT NOW PRODUCTIVITY HAD FALLEN TO 680 LB.

AMONG THE REASONS FOR THE LOW PRODUCTIVITY AND INFERIOR TOBACCO LEAF WERE IMPROPER CULTIVATION METHODS THAT WERE STILL BEING PRACTISED, HE SAID. — BERNAMA MORE 1715/1B

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DATUK SERI DR. MAHATHIR SAID THAT EFFORTS WERE BEING STEPPED UP TO UNDERTAKE RESEARCH, PARTICULARLY REGARDING THE CULTIVATION OF TOBACCO IN SANDY SOIL.

THE NEW ZEALAND GOVERNMENT HAD EXTENDED TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FOR THE RESEARCH AND THE NATIONAL TOBACCO BOARD ITSELF HAD ENGAGED AN EXPERT TO PROVIDE ADVICE.

INITIAL STUDIES, HE SAID, INDICATED THAT MILLIONS OF ACRES OF SANDY LAND ALONG THE EAST COAST OF THE PENINSULA HAD GOOD POTENTIAL FOR TOBACCO GROWING.

DATUK SERI DR. MAHATHIR HOPED THAT THE POTENTIAL SPELLED A BETTER SOCIO-ECONOMIC FUTURE FOR THE PEOPLE, ESPECIALLY THOSE IN THE EAST COAST.

HE SAID THAT THE BOARD WAS ALSO LOOKING INTO TOBACCO CURING METHODS BY USING DIESEL INSTEAD OF FIREWOOD, WHOSE PRICE HAD SHOT UP. — BERNAMA MORE 1720/1B

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HE SAID THAT EARLY STUDIES SHOWED THAT BY USING DIESEL THERE WAS A POSSIBILITY THAT PRODUCTION COSTS COULD BE REDUCED IN THE FUTURE.

THE BOARD WAS ALSO STUDYING MORE EFFICIENT CURING METHODS TO MODERNISE THE INDUSTRY.

DATUK SERI DR. MAHATHIR URGED CURERS TO REGARD THEIR WORK AS A TECHNICAL PROFESSION AND NOT AS A PART-TIME JOB IF THEY WISHED TO PRODUCE HIGH QUALITY CURED TOBACCO LEAF.

HE SAID THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAD PLACED VARIOUS FACILITIES AT THE DISPOSAL OF TOBACCO GROWERS IN VIEW OF THE FACT THAT THE INDUSTRY WAS PLAYING AN INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT ROLE IN RAISING THE RURAL PEOPLE'S ECONOMIC STATUS. — BERNAMA 1725/1B