

KUALA LUMPUR, OCT 23 (BERNAMA) -- DATUK SERI DR. MAHATHIR MOHAMAD HAS CALLED ON INDUSTRIALISTS TO STRIVE FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A NEW INDUSTRIAL ORDER IN THE LOCAL TIMBER AND TIMBER-BASED INDUSTRIES.

SPEAKING AT THE OPENING OF THE INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR ON INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES IN THE TIMBER-BASED INDUSTRIES IN MALAYSIA HERE TODAY, THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER SAID IT WAS NO LONGER PRACTICAL TO BE SATISFIED WITH THE QUICKER AND EASIER PROFITS OF PRIMARY PROCESSING.

"WE HAVE ALREADY DEVELOPED TO A STAGE WHERE WE ARE READY FOR SECONDARY AND EVEN TERTIARY WOOD PROCESSING INDUSTRIES," HE SAID. BY NOT DEVELOPING THIS SECTOR "WE WILL BE LITERALLY EXPORTING OUT OF THE COUNTRY, EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES, MANAGEMENT EXPERTISE, TECHNOLOGICAL KNOW-HOW AND BE LOSING OUT IN FOREIGN EXCHANGE IN SELLING LOW VALUE - ADDED PRODUCTS," HE ADDED.

—BERNAMA MORE 1409/AN

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HE SAID THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SECONDARY AND TERTIARY TIMBER PROCESSING SECTORS WOULD ALSO LEAD TO IMPORT SUBSTITUTION.

PENINSULAR MALAYSIA IMPORTED ABOUT \$560,000 WORTH OF WOODEN TRAYS, BOWLS AND ORNAMENTAL WOODWARE WHILE THE EXPORT AND RE-EXPORT VALUE OF LOCAL PRODUCTS WAS ONLY APPROXIMATELY \$50,000.

THE INDUSTRY SHOULD TAKE THE INITIATIVE TO TRY AND ADAPT TO LOWER GRADE AND SMALLER LOGS SO AS TO REDUCE THE SHORTAGE OF LOGS IN PENINSULAR MALAYSIA.

IT WAS ESTIMATED THAT ONLY 400 SPECIES OF THE 2,500 TIMBER SPECIES AVAILABLE IN THE COUNTRY WERE EXPLOITED FOR EXPORT OR DOMESTIC PROCESSING, DATUK SERI DR. MAHATHIR SAID.

"WE APPEAR TO BE FACING AN IMPENDING TIMBER SHORTAGE WHILE IN OUR JUNGLES WE HAVE THOUSANDS OF TONS OF THE LESSER KNOWN SPECIES," HE ADDED.

—BERNAMA MORE 1413/AN

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THE ONLY BARRIER, HE SAID, BETWEEN THE LESSER KNOWN SPECIES AND THEIR UTILISATION FOR MANUFACTURING PURPOSES WAS HUMAN INGENUITY.

THE EASY AVAILABILITY OF THE SO-CALLED POPULAR SPECIES HAD LULLED THE INDUSTRY INTO COMPLACENCY AND LITTLE OR NO RESEARCH WAS CARRIED OUT TO PROMOTE THE COMMERCIAL UTILISATION OF THE LESSER KNOWN SPECIES.

AT FIRST RUBBER WOOD WAS CONSIDERED UNSUITABLE FOR MAKING FURNITURE BUT ALL THE PROBLEMS WERE OVERCOME AND RUBBER WOOD IS NOW SUITABLE FOR SUCH A PURPOSE, HE SAID.

DATUK SERI DR. MAHATHIR SAID THE POTENTIAL OF RUBBER WOOD FOR MAKING FURNITURE AND FOR OTHER COMMERCIAL USES WAS WORTHY OF SERIOUS CONSIDERATION AS MALAYSIA HAD A HUGE SUPPLY OF THIS WOOD.

HE ALSO ASSURED GOVERNMENT SUPPORT FOR EVERY MOVE TO MAKE MALAYSIA NOT ONLY ONE OF THE WORLD'S LARGEST EXPORTERS OF HARDWOOD TIMBER BUT ALSO ONE OF THE WORLD'S LARGEST EXPORTER OF HARDWOOD TIMBER PRODUCTS.

—BERNAMA 1418/AN

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