

ADVICE TO AGRICULTURAL SECTOR

think big: Dr M

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MALAYSIANS must think big in agriculture. Prime Minister **Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad** said last night that the country must adopt a national approach in managing agricultural activities and a global approach in marketing the produce.

He said by virtue of the bigger population today, which is about 16 million, and that more and more of these are staying in big towns, the supply and distribution of food in the country also has to be made a big and sophisticated industry.

Addressing a dinner **organised** by the Agriculture Ministry in Kuala Lumpur, the Prime Minister said the country has to swiftly switch from traditional farming methods, whereby the activities are meant only for local consumption, as these would not help develop the industry.

Under the present circumstances, Malaysians cannot blame anyone but themselves if they are unable to take up the opportunities in the agriculture sector or fail to develop the agriculture industry.

He said although the nation could blame the colonial masters in the past for implementing policies that suited only their wishes and interests, this is no longer valid today.

Malaysians are now fully in charge of the country's policies and should now study and identify the reasons why the opportunities and potential in the agriculture sector are not capitalised on.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said due to the traditional methods **practised** in agriculture, the country has not been able to produce agricultural goods **com-**

mercially apart from, perhaps, natural rubber, oil palm and cocoa.

He said the nation was not concerned about the world market and exports before, that is why most of its agricultural activities are of the small-scale type.

"As long as we **practise** agriculture as small-time activities, which involve only traditional farmers, our agricultural industry will not expand," he said.

He said Malaysia is blessed with land and climate suitable for farming activities and this should in itself be a starting point towards enabling the country to become competitive. Malaysia's waters are also full of resources, although it is only now that the people are aware of this.

"For decades the foreigners

have been making fortunes out of our deep seas. We cry foul and are angry at them, but we ourselves are unable or not interested in grabbing the opportunities," he said.

The Prime Minister **criticised** those who protect traditional activities, in particular the fishermen's inefficient methods of fishing in rivers and **coastal** areas. He said these people are **in fact oppressing** the fishing community.

"Those who are too **sympathetic** with the traditional **fishermen** are actually hampering their progress. The sooner the fishermen accept modern methods and change, the **sooner will their livelihood improve**," he said.

He added that the same is also true of other sectors of the economy.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said the nation can feel sad about the plight of the fishermen, who are about the poorest community in the country, but nothing **can** help them "as long as they stick to the old fishing methods or limit their activities to fishing in rivers and coastal areas."

However, the Prime Minister cautioned that Malaysians should not be carried away with the belief that a change to modern and commercial methods will by itself bring success.

"**Adequate** preparation must be made to implement this. We need qualified people especially in management. Only with a coordinated and complete **approach** can we ensure **success**. Agriculture is not only a field for the peasants in Malaysia," **Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir** said.