

FOOD FOR FAIR PLAY

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PM: There should be one standard for all nations

By Rozani Din

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. — Massive propaganda campaigns against food-producing developing countries have deprived consumers of cheap sources of food from these countries, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today

The Prime Minister said these campaigns were conducted purely on economic considerations and had nothing to do with health and safety.

"Such irresponsible behaviour is not contributing to food safety or to overcoming poverty or food shortages," he said when opening the first Asian conference on food safety here.

Dr Mahathir said that in the past few years, a number of food trade issues had clouded relations between developing producing countries and the developed consumer and producer countries.

"In the process, the producer countries in the developing South have suffered," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the "over-zealous" implementation of quarantine measures had also prevented direct exports of fresh produce and animal products from developing countries.

He said the specifications and standards demanded by importers had to be realistic.

"There should be one standard for all countries in the world.

"However, what is acceptable in one country is not acceptable in another. Japan's standards are sometimes higher than that of the others. As an-example, when we

export bananas to Japan, they reject the consignment if they find a small black dot on the skin of the banana they say that it is rotten," he said.

Dr Mahathir said lately there was an attempt to mislead consumers in the developed countries with such labelling as "no tropical oil."

He said all these labellings put doubts in the consumer's mind, and he questioned the role of food control authorities.

"Ingredient labelling, required by law, is meant to inform consumers, but not to deceive them," he said.

He said it was very wrong to deceive to get a competitive edge for another product.

Dr Mahathir said not all countries had resorted to using the "no tropical oil" label.

"There is no proof that these

tropical oils are dangerous to the health," he added.

Dr Mahathir said food safety currently appeared to be one of the most widespread health problems in the world.

"Some of the underlying causes of this problem are as old as the human race, while others are the results of more recent developments of modern society," he said.

He said the widespread use of agrochemicals was an example of the "double edged sword of modern technology."

"Without agrochemicals, our food production would be severely limited, but their use also poses risks to our environment, health and food sources themselves," he said.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia had recognised the importance of a safe food supply and had given it top priority.