

DON'T BE LEFT BEHIND, PM TELLS FARMERS

By Zulkifli Talib

SHAH ALAM, Tues. — The agriculture sector must keep abreast with the rapid growth in the manufacturing and services industries so as not to be left behind, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said there were many agricultural methods and areas which were yet to be explored but could increase farmers' income and development of the country.

He added that although the agriculture sector was growing at a slow 3.5 per cent, it would continue to be one of the main activities especially in the rural areas.

"It is important that productivity of the agriculture sector be increased to become more efficient in respect to cost and competition.

"A more determined effort must be put into enhancing the sophistication of farm work, quality of management and in the workforce among farmers, breeders and fishermen," he said when launching the National Farmers, Breeders and Fishermen's Day at the Sri Cahaya Agriculture Park.

Dr Mahathir also said that the growth and viability of the agriculture sector would need old and traditional methods to be substituted with more commercial ones.

"This means that farmers must not only use so-

phisticated methods but also practice management policies that are orderly and in the style of plantations.

"More attention must be given to produce quality and market-oriented food.

"In this way farmers not only get higher returns but will be able to use their land at optimum levels," he said.

Dr 'Mahathir' said people in the agriculture sector must be receptive to new ideas and be well informed to help the nation achieve the developed country status by 2020.

"Some industrial and manufacturing components depend directly on the performance of the agriculture sector.

Dr Mahathir also said efforts must be made to make Malaysia a country capable of producing agricultural products and food at competitive prices for domestic and international markets.

"Several types of food commodities produced have shown that cost factors of production such as wages, rent and target returns were increasing.

Earlier, Agriculture Minister Datuk Seri Sanusi Junid urged farmers to lose the "subsidy mentality" if they wanted to progress.

Many activities have been planned in conjunction with this year's Farmers, Breeders and Fishermen's Day. The celebrations started with a convention on Aug 6 and will end on Aug 26.