

# PM: Agri sector must change

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**KUANTAN:** The agriculture sector must make early preparations to sharpen its competitive edge in line with Vision 2020, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday.

The Prime Minister said the sector needed to change critically in its way of life, thinking and attitude to be able to compete in the open market.

He said it would face

many challenges because of changes in international trading practices, market protection and competition from countries producing the same products.

These challenges cannot be taken lightly because agriculture is the main source of income for most of the rural folk.

The growth of the sector remains at four per cent as in 1990, but its contribution to the gross domestic product

dropped to 17.2 per cent from 18.8 in 1990.

Dr Mahathir said a day would come when the children of farmers, livestock breeders and fishermen would prefer jobs in the factories with assured incomes.

"Small-scale farming would have to be stopped and the nation would be forced to import food," he said.

He said small-scale farmers should consider pooling their resources.

"We know that big rubber and oil palm plantations have higher production for each hectare compared with small ones," said Dr Mahathir.

He also said that any protest or opposition to change introduced by the Government will only delay the process of implementation.

"The change is bound to come in the long run," he said, launching the national Farmers, Livestock Breeders and Fisher-

men's Day celebrations at the Indera Mahkota agricultural park.

He said the process of change would be smooth and organised, bringing immense benefits at a faster pace if it was accepted unhesitatingly.

He envisaged farmers being educated and well-trained in using efficient and modern tools in the management of estates in future.

"Many of them will own shares in big companies in line with their land and property value," Dr Mahathir said.

Among those who attended the celebrations were Agriculture Minister Datuk Seri Sanusi Junid, Defence Minister Datuk Seri Mohamed Najib Tun Razak, Human Resources Minister Datuk Lim Ah Lek and Pahang Menteri Besar Tan Sri Haji Khalil Yaacob.