

# Farm sector won't be neglected: PM

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By SHARIFF HAMID and RODHIAH ISMAIL

MALAYSIA, which aims to become an industrialised nation by the year 2020, will continue to give priority to the agriculture sector to ensure sufficient domestic food supplies.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said although the country is rapidly moving into industrial activities, the agriculture sector must not be neglected.

"This is because the sector, while declining in relative importance and facing manpower shortages, is still important in terms of generating revenue and providing raw materials for the industrial sector," he said at the launching of the New Agriculture Policy (NAP) 1992-2010 in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Dr Mahathir said the NAP, which provides an 18-year blueprint for agricultural development, takes into account changes taking place in the agricultural and industrial sectors.

He said the new policy, which replaces the National Agriculture Policy formulated in 1984, also encompasses the aspirations of the National Development Policy and Vision 2020.

The NAP, which aims to modernise and commercialise the sector, will employ six strategies — optimum use of resources, intensified development of agro-based industries, research and development, primary role of the private sector, market restructuring, and development of a dynamic food industry.

The optimum use of resources and rehabilitation

and consolidation of idle land will be given greater attention and will be supplemented with a comprehensive plan for land development.

The NAP, Dr Mahathir said, is not meant to develop Malaysia into an agricultural nation but to produce sufficient food for local consumption and export. To achieve this, the Government will encourage use of modern technology and methods to help increase productivity and improve the existing farm production systems.

"We realise this sector now faces problems such as unstable prices and lack of manpower. That is why in this policy we accord priority to activities that can help boost productivity and reduce manpower use to the minimum," he added.

The Prime Minister advised farmers, fishermen and livestock breeders to step up productivity by using modern techniques. "Those involved in the agricultural sector must be prepared to accept change and work harder to be on par with their counterparts in the developed nations.

"Fishermen who want to participate in deepsea fishing must be prepared to be away for more than a month without being home sick," he added.

He said, for the time being, the Government has stopped issuing licences for deepsea fishing because it wants to investigate whether those given the licences actually made use of them.

"This is because there are reports that some of them sell their licences to others. We are not freezing the licence," he added.



The Prime Minister said it is the Government's policy to produce only 65 per cent of the nation's food requirement, especially rice. This is to enable it to import food items from neighbouring countries and in return they

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will import Malaysian goods.

He said the 65 per cent in food supplies will be adequate to meet the country's needs in an emergency.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysians have the resources and ability to catch up with developed countries and it only requires determination to do so. "We have to work harder

than the rest of the world, to catch up with those countries ahead of us, such as Japan, the US and the European nations.

"We cannot afford to run slower than them or at their speed because if we were to do so, we will be left behind. We must also not be taken up by arguments of developed countries, which want us to move slowly as this will enable them to be ahead of us forever," he added.

He said the developed countries will continue to look down on us if we do nothing to match them in resources and ability.

Deputy Prime Minister Ghafar Baba, in his remarks

at the end of the launch, said the efficiency of the administrative machinery will be improved to ensure smooth implementation of the NAP. This includes providing incentives to boost private sector investments in agriculture.

He said the NAP accords special attention to interaction of competitive elements through information gathering and an analysis to enable farmers to survive in the marketplace without being overdependent on government subsidies and protection.

Ghafar said history and the experience of Malaysia and those industrialised countries which formerly relied on agriculture show that the present development is due to sheer hard work. He added that Malaysia can learn from the experience of industrialised countries in its efforts to develop the agriculture sector.

Malaysia can emulate some of the successes of developed countries, including professionalism, human resource development, research and development (R and D) and market information, Ghafar said.

He said Malaysia's success in the development of the natural rubber and palm oil industries is the result of efficient and professional management.

Professionalism has enabled organisations like the Rubber Industry Smallholders Development Authority, Federal Land Consolidation Rehabilitation Authority and National Padi and Rice Board to reduce the differences in productivity levels between private estates and smallholders.