

Ensuring food

By Jeffrey Ramayah

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. — The National Agriculture Policy is aimed at ensuring food security over the next 18 years, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said that despite the stress on industrial development in line with the vision to make the country a fully developed one by the year 2020, the Government had to take steps to ensure food sufficiency for the country's 18 million population.

"We need a national policy on agriculture to ensure that this sector continues to cater to the needs of the growing population," he said when launching the National Agriculture Policy 1992-2010 at the Putra World Trade Centre here.

Dr Mahathir said although Malaysia was not the agriculture-based country that it used to be, the agricultural sector was very important as food production was vital.

He said 65 per cent of the nation's rice requirement was met locally with the rest coming from imports.

"We import rice from neighbouring countries so that these countries will buy our products.

"If we are 100 per cent self-sufficient, then the countries that we buy rice from will not purchase our products," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the people must be prepared to accept changes that were required in order for the agricultural sector to be effective and viable.

"Our food production methods and the machinery used have undergone major changes and we will see further changes in time to come, especially in the next 18 years."

He said nothing was permanent and the people must adapt to changes if they wanted to progress.

Countries which did not change had suffered and had been deprived of modernisation and sophisticated development worldwide, he said.

"Malaysia itself has undergone tremendous change and the people have accepted these

changes for the better," he said.

Dr Mahathir said 200 years ago, 95 per cent of the population in the United States of America were involved in the agricultural sector.

"Today, only five per cent of the US population is involved in the agricultural sector but the country is not only able to provide food for its 250 million people but also export food products," he said.

While the number of people in food production in the country will drop over time, efforts must be taken through modern methods to step up food production.

Dr Mahathir said many people from the rural areas had moved to urban areas to earn a living and had discarded traditional farming practices.

"There is a shortage of

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manpower in the agricultural sector and that is why the Government had to import foreign labour to meet the required workforce in plantations," he said.

He said Malaysia had moved into an era where the country was able to produce sophisticated equipment for use locally and abroad.

Dr Mahathir said the Government also encouraged deep-sea fishing and fishermen had been using modern and sophisticated vessels.

"We have not frozen the issuance of deep-sea fishing licences.

"What we are doing is to ensure that only those who are genuinely involved in deep-sea fishing are given licences.

"We do not want anyone to sell the licence given to him," he said.

ional Agriculture Policy sufficiency