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Mahathir-Agriculture

GOVT REVISING AGRICULTURE POLICY WHICH FAILED TO MEET TARGET

SHAH ALAM, Aug 21 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the National Agriculture Policy (1992-2010) is being revised as it has not achieved its objectives to create a more commercial approach to agriculture to enable those involved to earn higher incomes.

The policy revision will take cognizance of the changing scenario in a rapidly industrialising nation, Dr Mahathir said in a keynote address on "Revitalising Agriculture and Agro-based Industries in Malaysia" at the Second Asia-Pacific Conference on Plant Physiology here.

The three-day conference, organised by the Malaysian Society of Plant Physiology (MSPP) was opened by Science, Technology and Environment Minister Datuk Law Hieng Ding yesterday.

The participants are from Malaysia, Australia, Japan, India, China, the Philippines, Argentina, Singapore, New Zealand, United Kingdom, France, Switzerland and Holland.

Dr Mahathir said after four years of implementation the policy has not achieved its target.

However, he said, the Seventh Malaysia Plan launched in May this year presented clearer strategies for a more commercially attractive approach to agriculture.

The plan called on the private sector to be an equal and vital player in its implementation.

"The primary focus of the plan is to improve productivity through a much more effective and efficient use of resources," Dr Mahathir said.

The Prime Minister said agriculture in Malaysia faces structural and organisational issues that need to be resolved if the sector is to be re-engineered for growth and development.

"Current challenges to the industry have to be addressed and translated into innovative strategies and pragmatic policies if the food, fibre and energy needs of the nation are not to be jeopardised," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the import of food items was already among the biggest segments contributing to the country's current balance of payment deficit.

"With a rapidly growing and more affluent population, the situation can only get worse before it can get better," he said.

He said it was for this and other reasons that under the Seventh Malaysia Plan, the private sector has been urged to initiate, manage and drive large-scale production of food and value-added products including horticulture produce.

"A new renaissance-style paradigm shift has also been advocated to ensure that modern management techniques be introduced to replace the basically peasant-style agriculture and smallholdings which are no longer capable of meeting a mass-consumption economy," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the agricultural sector must help to reverse the excess of imports over exports and be a source of foreign exchange earnings through the application of new processing technology for added value to Malaysia's exports.

He said there is a need to look into the marketing of commodities, especially agricultural products.

The Prime Minister also spoke about "a disturbing trend" in the world today where food is being used as a bargaining political tool in the international arena, including the use of trade sanctions to achieve compliance.

"The situation is made worse because a recent grains crisis has revealed how much the developing countries depend on the developed countries for their food supply," he said.

Speaking to reporters later, Dr Mahathir said the National Agriculture Policy is being revised "because the present situation is not the same as four years ago (when the policy was implemented)."

He said there is now a labour shortage and land is scarce and, as such, the policy would have to be tuned according to the present situation. --

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