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Third NAP comes with RM32.4b action plan

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KUALA LUMPUR, Wed - The Cabinet today approved the country's Third National Agriculture Policy 1998-2010 with new approaches on agroforestry and product-based output.

For the first time, the policy or NAP3 also comes with a RM32.4-billion Plan of Action for the 13-year period, Agriculture Minister Datuk Amar Dr Sulaiman Daud announced today.

He said new policy thrusts would address national concerns of food security, inflation, productivity, private sector investment in agriculture, enhancing exports and reducing unproductive imports; and conservation and sustainable use of natural resources.

The action plan comprises short, medium and long-term measures.

Short-term measures include identifying and zoning areas for production of short-term food crops and aquaculture and providing appropriate infrastructure and facilities in these areas.

Medium-term measures include provision of marketing infrastructure like wholesale markets, collection and selling centres with handling and packaging facilities in production areas; increasing retail outlets through the gazette of permanent sites for farmers' markets and promoting Malaysia as a halal food centre.

Medium-term measures also include promoting Malaysian brand names as well as sourcing cheaper raw materials and food products.

Among the long-term actions are focusing development on perennial fruits, new products, future industries, human resource development in new emerging areas in agriculture, introducing import substitution and enhancing research and development efforts.

"This agriculture policy comes with a specific action plan and reflects our seriousness and commitment to the policy," Sulaiman told a Press conference at his ministry, adding, however, that a much more detailed action plan would be worked out after consultation with State Governments.

He said the investment that needed to be mobilised from the private sector totalled RM21.4 billion while RM11 billion would come from the public sector.

Industrial crops would require a total private sector investment of RM9.9 billion, of which RM6.1 billion would be for the development of the oil palm crop.

The food sector and the development of new industries would require a total private sector investment of RM11.5 billion.

He said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad issued a reminder that it was necessary to co-operate closely with State Governments as land was a State matter.

On the agroforestry approach, Sulaiman said it was aimed at addressing increasingly scarce including land and raw material availability.

"In this approach, agriculture and forestry are viewed as mutually compatible and complementary, thereby providing a scope for joint development," he said, adding that the integration of agriculture and forestry was also aimed at creating a larger productive base for both sectors.

The second new strategic approach, the product-based approach, he said, was adopted to "reinforce and complement the cluster-based agro-industrial development as identified in the Second Industrial Master Plan 1996-2005.

"The product-based approach emphasises satisfying the specific needs of

niche markets and consumers world-wide who are increasingly demanding products that are more specific to their needs and preferences.

"In this approach, key products and markets are identified based on market demand, preferences and potential.

"This market demand and preferences are translated into strategies for upstream primary agricultural production to enhance production and marketing of the agricultural produce."

Sulaiman said among strategies formulated to enhance food security and combat inflation were increasing domestic food production, reducing imports and "strategic sourcing" where investments and joint ventures in food production could be set up in low production-cost countries in Asean Growth Areas and the Mekong River Basin.

The Minister also said that agro-technology parks would be developed to promote high technology agricultural production systems by the private sector and that two companies had already expressed interest in this area.

"Such production systems involve mechanised operations, precision control of inputs and growing environment, production of quality and high value products such as fruits, vegetables, aquarium fish, flowers, fishery and livestock products," he said.

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