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Mahathir-Agriculture

FARMING SECTOR GETS PRIORITY IN SECOND HALF OF SMP, SAYS PM

KUALA LUMPUR, April 22 (Bernama) -- Revitalising the farming sector will be a priority in the remaining period of the Seventh Malaysian Plan to make Malaysia a key producer of value-added agricultural products, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

Towards this end, a RM8.3 billion allocation would be set aside for agriculture and rural development, he said.

"As a support service, credit facilities will continue to be extended to smallholders in particular.

"In this context, additional allocation has been injected to boost the Food Fund to RM1 billion," he said when tabling a motion on the mid-term review of the Plan at the Dewan Rakyat today.

He said revitalising the agricultural sector would entail boosting domestic food production to minimise dependence on imports and accelerating modernised farming through modern technology and management as well as large-scale and systematic farming.

This called for a strategy that emphasised intensive use of already scarce land and labor resources and that would consolidate export by encouraging greater private sector participation in large-scale and commercialised undertakings, he said.

Dr Mahathir said the government would stress on innovation and application of modern technology, for example in cage-rearing of sea fish and labour-saving applications.

On human resource development, he said the emphasis would be on supplying skilled workforce to support restructuring of the national economy to be one that is capital-intensive and knowledge-based.

"The emphasis will be on enhancing access to quality education and training to bring about higher levels of educational excellence and workforce efficiency," he said.

There would be sustained investment to upgrade the capabilities of internal training institutions besides encouraging greater private sector involvement in this field, he said.

He said an electronic information exchange on labour would be set up to ensure optimum labour use and coordinate labour supply and demand as part of efforts to increase inter-state labour mobility.

Further efforts towards eradicating poverty and restructuring society would be specially targeted at areas and sectors of the community experiencing high incidence of abject poverty, he said.

Programmes for providing basic services and amenities to low-income earners and the poor, including building of new homes and repairing old ones, would be expanded, he said.

Some of the society-restructuring programmes would be modified and extended so as to lessen the effects of the economic slowdown on low-income earners and the poor outside the Klang Valley area.

Dr Mahathir said Bumiputeras would continue to be given assistance to acquire higher educational qualification in line with the objective of increasing the number of Bumiputera professionals and technocrats.

He said that to reduce income disparity, the government would adopt further measures to develop a larger pool of Bumiputera entrepreneurs, professionals and managers and subsequently a more affluent middle-class.

-- BERNAMA

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