

# Penalty for leaving land idle

PM: We may impose higher taxes to gain some benefit

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**BANGI, Thurs:** The government may impose higher taxes on farmers and owners of agricultural land which is under-utilised.

"If they (landowners and farmers) fail to maximise the use of their land, the government may impose higher taxes so that we can gain some benefit," said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

He said this after chairing a meeting of the council for public-private sector coordination in agriculture here today.

Mahathir was asked how the government can promote cattle-farming in oil palm estates to promote the livestock farming industry.

He said the government will use "the carrot-and-stick" approach in which those who maximise the use of their land will be "given something in return".

He stressed that the government is serious about developing the agricultural sector to not only reduce its imports and attain self-sufficiency but also to be an exporter.

"The Agriculture Ministry has prepared the plan-

ning, we've been briefed, we've approved it and agreed to provide sufficient allocation to the ministry. I am confident we will take off any-time soon," he said.

On the meeting, Mahathir said: "From our discussions, it is clear that there are vast opportunities in agriculture that promise higher income than just planting oil palm and rubber."

The meeting was attended by several ministers, mentris besar, chief ministers and representatives of agro-based agencies including farmers, fishermen and livestock farmers' associations.

Mahathir said three working papers were discussed - the ministry's general plan and approaches, the need for cooperation between the federal government, state governments and the private sector, and the role of private sector and the problems they face.

He said many among the private sector also gave their views mainly on land matters, including the difficulties in getting land, too much idle land, unsuitable land and the types of crops to focus on for the industry.