

23/07/2000

Mixed farming the key (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - The Government will introduce the mixed farming concept to boost food production and help increase farm incomes, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

This was also intended to ensure Malaysia produced enough for its needs.

"We hope the mixed farming concept, which we plan to introduce, will help farmers maximise their incomes.

"However, the plans we have for the agricultural sector will only work if farmers are willing to discard the old methods in farming," he said. Such methods would not help farmers to reap higher yields.

Elaborating on the concept, Dr Mahathir said the types of crops or vegetables to be grown would depend on the demand and climate. Livestock farming could also be carried out on the same piece of land simultaneously.

Dr Mahathir said it was important for Malaysia to be self-sufficient in food or it would otherwise face the risk of being re-colonised.

"Relying on another country for food, which is our basic necessity, is dangerous and can curtail our freedom," he said.

He said this in his speech when opening the Malaysian Agricultural, Horticultural and AgroTourism Show 2000 at the National Stadium in Bukit Jalil.

Dr Mahathir said the Government would adopt the best established practices in mixed farming from developed countries.

Local universities would then be entrusted with providing training on the proper management of such farms.

Under the concept, he said, the need for man power would be greatly reduced with the use of sophisticated machinery.

"The landowner can also decide whether he or she wants to till the land or remain a shareholder," he said.

Citing an example, Dr Mahathir said under the concept smallholdings would be amalgamated and turned into huge rubber estates or oil palm plantations.

He said the government agencies would also try out the "greenhouse" agricultural methods to see if it was suitable.

"Livestock farming will have to be modernised. Today, Malaysia produces enough chicken and chicken eggs and some of it is also exported," he said, adding that if Malaysians did not eat much chicken previously, the bird had now become a staple.

He said if farmers could supply more duck, goose, turkey, ostrich and deer meat or even more fresh water fish, shrimp, or salt water fish, then this would give Malaysians more choices and help the farmers supplement their income.

"Even greens such as ulam and pucuk-pucuk are no longer eaten because they are so hard to come by. We depend on those which grow naturally," he said.

On another note, Dr Mahathir said certain quarters would make absurd allegations against the Government whenever it tried to introduce new programmes for the benefit of the people.

"There will be allegations of the Government trying to rob farmers of their rights, victimise them and so on," he said, adding that such accusations would only hamper the vision for the agricultural sector.

"What is important to these parties is that the hatred for the

government will benefit their political cause," he said.

Citing an example, he said, when the Government spent hundreds of millions of ringgit to improve the Muda Irrigation System (in Kedah) to allow padi to be planted twice a year, the Opposition criticised the Government, alleging that the farmers were being forced to work throughout the year.

"Today we no longer hear the Opposition making such accusations. In fact those who had opposed the Muda Irrigation project are today themselves growing padi in the area," he said.

Also present was Agriculture Minister Datuk Effendi Norwawi and MAHA 2000 chairman Datuk Annuar Maarof, who is also the Ministry's secretary-general.

Held in conjunction with the National Farmers Day, the nine-day show will feature indoor and outdoor exhibits from various agricultural sectors.

Organised by the Agriculture Ministry, MAHA 2000 will showcase new research discoveries, latest technologies and high-quality agricultural products.

More than two million visitors are expected at MAHA 2000.

This will be the second time the show is held since its revival after a lapse of 32 years.

MAHA 2000 is expected to draw in sales between RM1 billion and RM2 billion.

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