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Effendi-Agriculture

PM TO CHAIR CONSULTATIVE COUNCIL ON AGRICULTURAL ADVANCEMENT

PETALING JAYA, Feb 10 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will chair the Private Sector-Public Sector Consultative Council on Agriculture to be formed soon to boost the advancement in the country's agricultural sector.

Agriculture Minister Datuk Mohd Effendi Norwawi said the fact that the prime minister himself would chair the council was a clear indication of how much importance was being placed on the agriculture sector.

"It is our prime minister's vision to make the agriculture sector the most prominent sector in the new millennium," he told a news conference after launching a forum on cleaning up the Sungai Klang, here today.

He said Dr Mahathir has agreed that at the end of April, he would chair a session with the captains of industries of this country to discuss various investment opportunities in agriculture.

He said a lot of people thought that modern agriculture based on biotechnology economy would be the next wave of economic activity after the agricultural revolution which was followed by the industrial revolution and the current Information Technology revolution.

Effendi said the country had been successful with industrialisation and information technology and the next thing to achieve was to be as successful in agriculture.

"...and the only way that we can move forward is with the involvement of both the private and public sector," he said, adding that in April the ministry would demonstrate to them that investment in agriculture was indeed very attractive, very viable and offered very high returns.

He said the government would also talk about incentives, how to provide better packages and how to mitigate their risks so that the private sector investors would invest in agriculture.

"We buy RM12 billion of food products every year and some sectors like the fisheries sector has the potential to grow from RM4 billion per year to RM11 billion per year which is huge for private sector involvement," he said.

He believed Malaysia already had the knowledge in the required sciences, quoting as example the Malaysian Agricultural Research and Development Institution (MARDI) as probably the most prominent in the world in R&D in tropical fruit sciences.

"So the knowledge in sciences is (already) with us. It's now applying that knowledge to commercial level... and this requires private sector capital to come in," he said.

Effendi said both local and foreign private sectors, especially the agro-based multinational corporations, would be invited to participate in various agricultural activities.

"It would be modern farming to increase productivity so that there'll be abundant supply (of food products)," he said.

He pointed out that Malaysia's expertise in plantation management especially in oil palm and rubber was already number one in the world and with Universiti Putra Malaysia already drafting specific courses for plantation and farm managers the country would have enough manpower for the field.

-- BERNAMA

MNY AO