

Go for agro products, says PM

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By NICK LEONG

SERDANG: The private sector should play a bigger role in developing and marketing local agriculture products, says Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

He said businessmen had been slow in tapping the huge potential for local agriculture products despite the Government's plan to make the sector the new engine of

growth for the economy.

"We are giving a lot of attention to agriculture but people are more keen to buy and sell shares, (taking) the easy way out.

"Unless people are serious about agriculture, we cannot make it an engine of growth," he said after a working visit to Malaysian Agriculture Research and Development Institute (Mardi) here yesterday.

Also there were Agriculture Minister Datuk Mohd Effendi Nawawi and Science, Technology and Environment Minister Datuk Law Hieng Ding.

Dr Mahathir said development of the agriculture sector was about exploiting its potential.

"It is not about increasing (the Government's) budget. We have lots of products which can be commercialised but everyone waits and when

they have money, they buy shares.

"We cannot ask the Government to do everything, to invest, produce, feed and serve everyone," he added.

Dr Mahathir said Mardi had through its research and development programme, demonstrated the superiority and potential of various local agriculture products.

For example, he said, oil palm fronds which were

abundant and cheap could be turned into cattle feed, chip boards and "paper that is tearproof."

"But not many people (in the private sector) make use of this. Many discoveries made by Mardi are not commercialised.

"They need to conduct feasibility studies on cost so it is more attractive and save costs. If they do, Mardi will benefit and carry out more

studies," he said.

Earlier, Effendi said it was estimated that RM30bil in investment was needed to turn the agriculture sector into the new engine of growth.

He said the Government hoped 70% of the investment would come from the private sector.

"The Government will contribute in terms of providing the basic infrastructure and research," he added.