

Dr M: Are

# genetically modified foods really harmful?

KUALA LUMPUR: Genetically Modified (GM) food should be tested thoroughly to allay fears of side effects, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday.

He said GM food could be tested on animals, or through other medical methods, to verify its short and long-term effects.

"There are a lot of people in the world today who do not have enough food and genetically modified crops might be able to increase food production.

"We should not cast aside completely something which could benefit us," he told reporters after opening the International Convention on Bio-technology at Putra World Trade Centre here yesterday.

Dr Mahathir noted that there was a kind of "hysteria" directed against GM foods around the world.

"Is there a basis for it? If there is none, then GM foods can solve the starvation problem we face today," he said.

He added that there were a lot of warehouses with GM foods in Africa not being distributed to feed hungry Africans because of fear it might be harmful.

Dr Mahathir said the Government planned to set up a 'bio-valley' in the Klang Valley.

He said the project was intended to be a catalyst and test bed for the development of Malaysia's bio-technology industry.

"At the moment, MARDI (Malaysian Agriculture Research and Development Institute) and various universities conduct their own research. We fear there might be duplication in their research," he said.

He said the proposed bio-valley would consist of three research institutes, namely in genomic, agriculture and pharmaceutical.