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Mahathir-Agriculture

AGRICULTURE SECTOR TO BE REVITALISED, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 30 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today said Malaysia will step up efforts to make agriculture a key sector in its economy as the sector grew by 1.5 per cent during the review period of the Eighth Malaysia Plan (8MP) as a result of increased output of palm oil and food commodities.

The Prime Minister said agricultural export earnings rose by 26 per cent per annum from RM23 billion in 2000 to RM29 billion in 2003 supported by the higher prices of primary and food commodities.

He said the improvement in the export of food commodities was a result of increasing investments in large scale food production and improvements in quality undertaken in the context of the Ministry of Agriculture Incorporated approach.

"In the next two years, the agriculture sector is expected to grow at a higher rate of 2.7 per cent per annum. The growth of this sector will be derived from the increased output of industrial crops, food production and the contribution from new activities," Dr Mahathir said when tabling the motion on the Mid-Term Review of the 8MP in the Dewan Rakyat here today.

He said while the country has yet to reverse its position as a net food importer, it has achieved self-sufficiency in poultry and eggs and near sufficiency in fisheries.

He said the Government has identified fish farming or aquaculture as having great growth potential.

"The Government will intensify efforts to develop new infrastructure, improvement in skills and technologies to promote modern aquaculture. This involves the breeding of a variety of marketable and highly demanded fish and crustaceans," he said.

For this purpose, Dr Mahathir said the Government will accelerate the implementation of the National Seedling Programme and Action Plan for Hatchery Development.

He said the Government will provide support services to encourage investments in the tuna industry by establishing four Tuna regional Development Centres in Johor, Penang, Sabah and Labuan.

The Prime Minister said the Government will also intensify efforts to develop the potentials of biomass and biotechnology products for domestic and export markets.

Programmes to develop speciality natural products such as herbs, spices and medicinal plants on an integrated and commercial bases will be accelerated, he said.

In addition, the National Botanical Garden project will be developed as a showcase for new investment opportunities in the agriculture sector, apart from being a recreational and tourist site.

To boost developments in the agriculture sector, the Prime Minister said more effective enabling technologies will be promoted.

He said among these will be the extensive use and applications of ICT-related technologies and adoption of e-commerce.

In this regard, the agriculture, Technology-Industry-Government-Electronic Revolution or the AgriTIGeR, aimed at enhancing productivity and increasing competitiveness in the agriculture sector, will be extended to more areas including Sabah and Sarawak, said Dr Mahathir.

Under AgriTIGeR, a cost-effective business-to-business supply chain

management application and a portal called Agribazaar will be further developed, where the Agribazaar will function as an exchange gateway for agricultural communities and traders to conduct online transactions.

He said apart from sustaining Malaysia's competitiveness in palm oil "vis-a-vis" other oil and fats in the world market, efforts are underway to develop the country into a competitive food exporter.

More technicians, professionals and entrepreneurs will be trained in modern agriculture practices and skills, he said.

To achieve this aspiration, Dr Mahathir said the National Agricultural Training Centre will be entrusted to plan, coordinate and provide training and skills programmes.

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