Malaysian firm part of Lesotho green revolution

MASERU (Lesotho): A Malaysian company is embarking on an ambitious plan to revolutionise the agriculture sector in Lesotho.

Its US$100mil (RM378mil) plan to grow cotton, a first in this country, will make it the main crop, replacing maize.

The project promises more than 20,000 desperately needed jobs when fully implemented over five years.

TLWAY TEXCO Sdn Bhd chief executive officer K. Ramamurthi said his company's plan was a pioneer project to grow cotton in Lesotho.

"Since it is a labour-intensive industry, it will produce a lot of jobs for the locals," he said, adding that some 10,000ha would be planted.

Ramamurthi said his company was bringing along know-how and capital in a smart partnership with the full support and involvement of the Lesotho National Development Corp.

He said they would also try to replicate their success in growing cotton in Uzbekistan by adopting the techniques and expertise used there.

"We have two factories in Uzbekistan that manufacture garments for export to the United States and the European Union.

"We have been successful, and the Uzbek government has granted us the exclusive rights to sell cotton to Malaysia," he said.

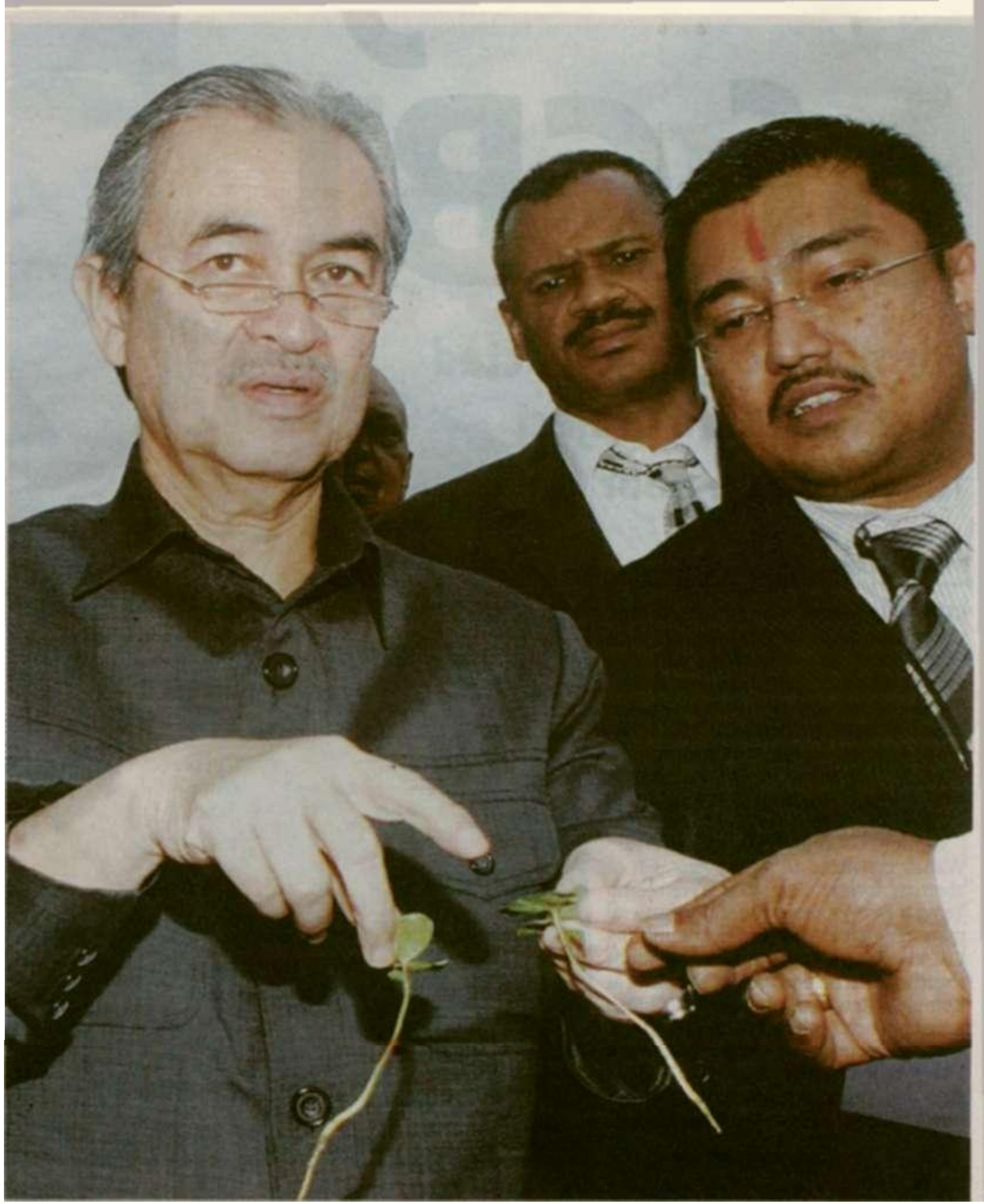
On the plan for Lesotho, Ramamurthi said it would be an integrated project to grow cotton and to use the raw material to make garments.

He said this would involve the entire process of spinning, yarning, knitting, dyeing and manufacture of garments.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi visited TLWAY's experimental farm on the sidelines of Global 2005 Smart Partnership International Dialogue. Ramamurthi is one of the smart partners in this dialogue.

On TLWAY's investment in Lesotho, Abdullah said he was glad to see enterprising Malaysians investing abroad.

He commended TLWAY for its involvement in Lesotho and on its success in Uzbekistan.



NEW PROJECT: Abdullah trying to find out more about the cotton seedling at TLWAY's experimental farm in Maseru yesterday. Beside him is Ramamurthi. — *Bernamapic*