

Agro shift 'right move'

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Pak Lah feels vindicated by healthy growth of industry

By SA'ODAH ELIAS
odae@thestar.com.my

KUALA LUMPUR: Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi feels vindicated by the healthy growth of the agriculture industry, seeing this as proof that his decision to focus on the sector was the right move.

"People said I was moving backward but now everyone can see how healthy the growth of the agriculture industry is," he said on the criticism levelled at him for making agriculture a priority when he took over as Prime Minister three years ago.

Speaking to newsmen after opening the 2006 Agro-Based Industry Expo yesterday, he said the emphasis on agriculture was a conscious effort by the Government to put more money in the people's pockets, particularly rural residents.

He said the revival of the Green Book campaign should provide the impetus for more people to venture into agriculture.

"Under this campaign, we not only want to produce enough food for domestic consumption to reduce our food bill and give farmers a better livelihood, we also want to produce in excess



AMAZING CATCH: Abdullah looking at a 30kg tuna fish caught in the Indian Ocean at the Fisheries Development Board's booth at the Putra World Trade Centre yesterday. With him are Agriculture and Agro-based Industries Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin (right) and the board's deputy director-general (development) Mustafa Ahmad. — *Bernamapic*

so that we can become an exporter," he said.

"I am confident this industry can be one of the main sources of income and wealth for the people and the country."

The Ninth Malaysia Plan,

which will be announced next month, is expected to provide greater incentives to take agriculture to a more dynamic and competitive level in line with the blueprint for the balance of trade plan 2010.

The plan is an intervention policy to increase the volume and value of agriculture and food produce for export, to achieve a positive balance of trade of at least RM1.2bil by 2010.

At the moment, agriculture only constitutes about 12% of Malaysia's total exports.

In his speech, Abdullah said more young entrepreneurs were becoming interested in agriculture, either as farmers or producers of agro-based products.

"I am very happy to note that our farmers and food producers are getting more inventive and innovative. There are now more new agro-based products in the market," he said.

"This has given me the confidence to go ahead with the plan to transform this industry. This is also going to be a factor that will attract more people, including graduates, to this industry."

On the expo, Abdullah said it was not meant to make the people "feel good" but to showcase the industry's achievements and serve as an eye-opener to others on its potential.

The four-day trade fair is being held at the Putra World Trade Centre's exposition hall.

Among the products on display are processed food products and new fruit varieties like square watermelons and seedless *cempedak*.