

Agro sector a goldmine worth RM6b, says PM

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KUALA BERANG: High-impact projects in agriculture can generate about RM6.3 billion in revenue for the country by 2010, according to government estimates.

"Agriculture is business. High-impact projects in this sector will not only provide jobs and create new sources of wealth for the people but also revenue for the country," Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said yesterday.

He said the government had identified 61 areas covering 36,905 hectares where 39 high-impact projects in the agriculture sector could be created by 2010.

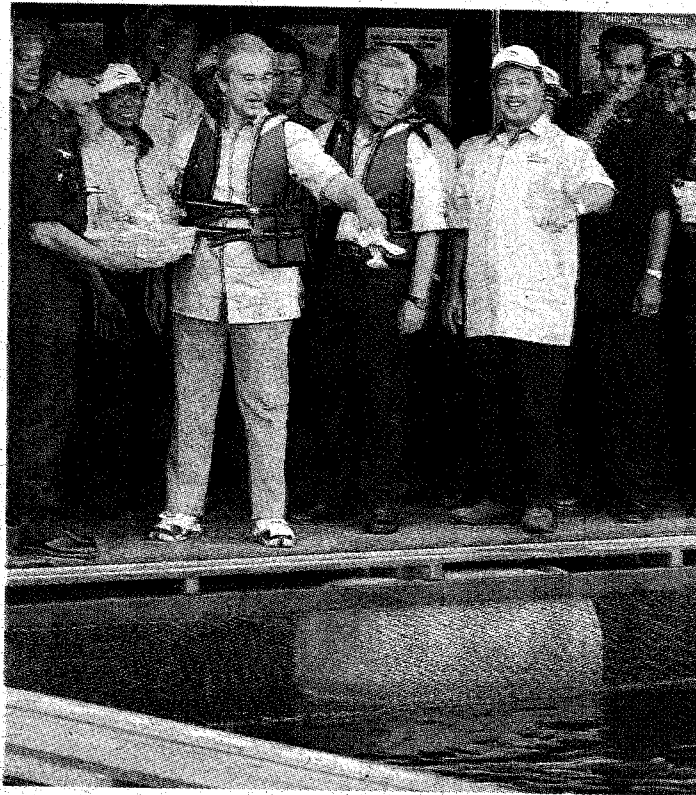
"These projects will benefit more than 22,000 participants, including graduates, fishermen and the hardcore poor," he said after visiting the country's largest aquaculture project at Sungai Como in Tasik Kenyir.

The project covers 2,800ha and 240 participants, who will manage 6,000 fish cages. The government has allocated RM50 million for its development.

Project participants only have to worry about raising the fish, mainly red tilapia, while marketing has been assigned to a private firm. This arrangement will ensure the long-term viability of the project.

Abdullah said the commercial production of high-value freshwater fish in the Sungai Como project would provide sustainable income for the participants.

The involvement of a range of people, especially graduates who were serious about agriculture, could spearhead the transformation of the sector, particularly in



Datuk Seri Abdullah feeds fish during his visit to the Sungai Como project site in Tasik Kenyir yesterday. With him are Terengganu Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Idris Jusoh and Agriculture and Agro-based Industry Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin.

the fisheries sub-sector, he said.

He said graduates could help prove sceptics wrong, especially those in the rural areas.

"The agriculture sector is a goldmine for those willing to follow good agricultural practice. Graduates could also play an important role by taking the lead in agro-based industries.

"We are also hoping that the private sector will exploit the potential in aquaculture."

For Terengganu, he said, the launching of the high-impact project at Sungai Como notched another success for the Barisan Nasional government in its efforts to create wealth for the people, especially fishermen.

Abdullah singled out fishermen as the target group as they were often associated with poverty.

"By participating in aquaculture, they will be able to earn a steady income all year round."

Earlier, at the launch of the Aquaculture Industrial Zone at Sekolah Kebangsaan Tapah, Abdullah urged the private sector to promote agricultural exports.

The government has targeted the production of 662,000 tonnes of marine fish, freshwater fish and seaweed by 2010. Currently, the output was only 250,000 tonnes.

Abdullah said he also wanted to see small-scale farmers progress from production to marketing and to diversify into other agricultural sub-sectors.

"Their success will open the eyes of the people who will see the wealth of opportunities in this sector."

Abdullah also directed federal government agencies and the Johor government to ensure only genuine flood victims receive assistance.

"There are those who are opportunistic and pretend to be victims of the flood. They (agencies) must be careful to ensure only the genuine victims receive assistance.

"What is more important is that those who have been identified must be given the assistance immediately. Don't wait," he said.

The prime minister was responding to a question on the grouses by some flood victims who complained that financial assistance was slow and hampered by bureaucratic red tape.

Some of them had claimed that some agencies had requested that victims surrender their water and electricity bills to prove that they were actually flood victims.

Abdullah said the quantum of financial aid to the victims was approved by the state government with co-operation from federal agencies.