

PM: Give bio-safety attention

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KUALA LUMPUR: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi yesterday expressed his concern over the level of preparedness in Asia in terms of bio-safety and bio-security in connection with biotechnology development.

Countries must always be vigilant, he said. "If we fail, then we may find that there will be a heavy price to pay."

He said this in his address to delegates at the opening of the two-day Bio-safety and Bio-security Asia 2007 Conference at Putra World Trade Centre, which was read out by Home Affairs Minister Datuk Seri Mohd Radzi Sheikh Ahmad.

"I hope that this is something that will be given due consideration during the course of this conference."

He said bio-safety and bio-security issues would be more urgent and important as the full implications of "our recent achievements in the life sciences become clearer to us".

Abdullah said the government had drafted a Bio-safety Bill, which would create a robust legal framework for managing bio-safety issues.

He said bio-safety encompassed safe practices in the handling of biological agents, managing the risk of food chain contamination and the promotion of safety standards in research work.

"By its nature, work in bio-

safety is precautionary and preventive."

Bio-security, Abdullah said, involved active efforts to protect populations and food sources from large-scale epidemics, whether occurring naturally or from the use of biological weapons.

Bio-security measures included monitoring patterns that suggested emerging epidemics, ensuring sufficient stockpiles of appropriate vaccines in case of outbreaks as well as expanding public health education and spreading alertness.

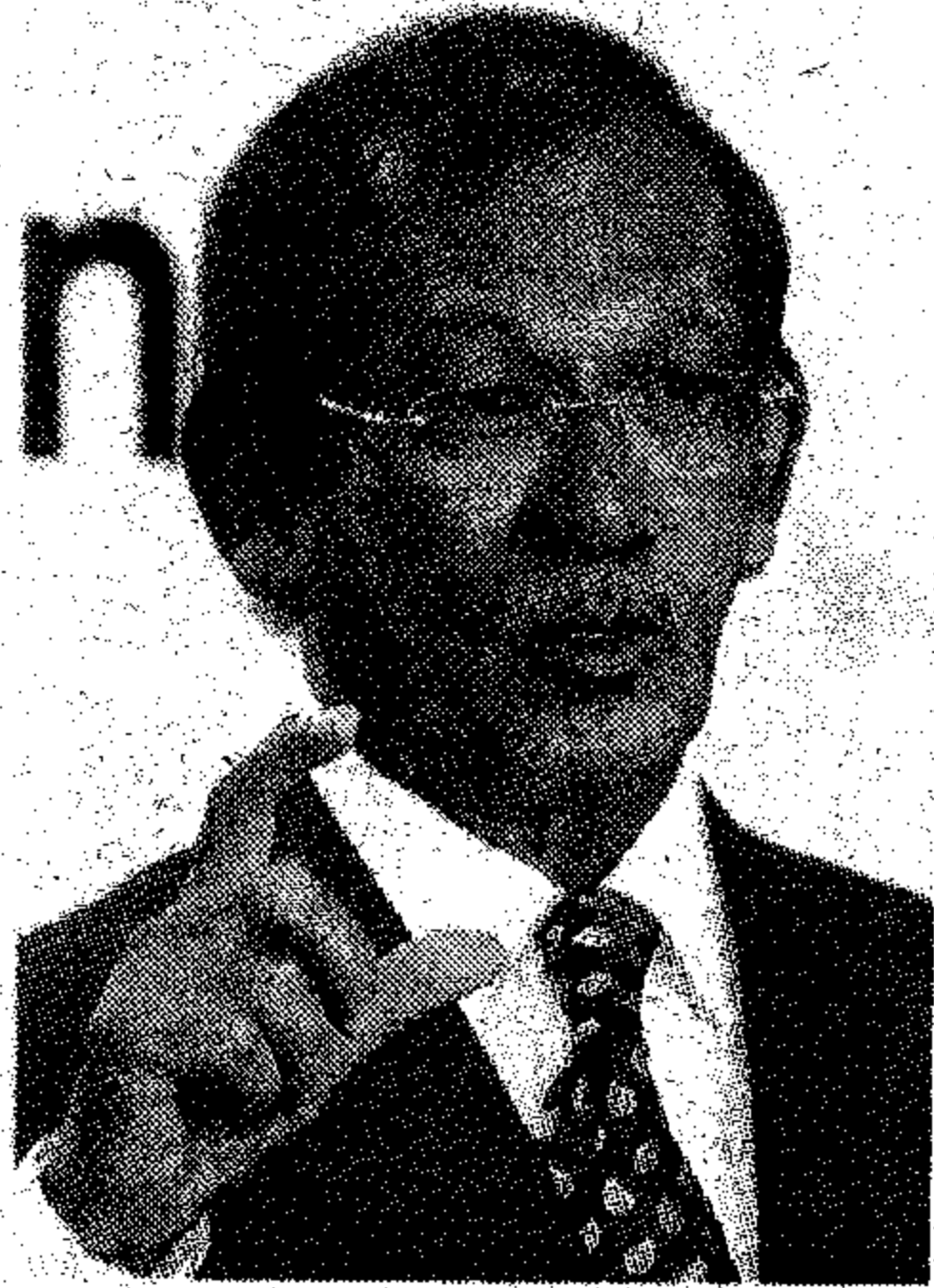
On the Bio-safety Bill, Radzi said it would be tabled in Parliament in June for its second reading and to be debated.

He said the bill was to gov-

ern and complement modern biotechnology to ensure technology growth without compromising human and environmental safety.

According to K. Nagulendran, a senior official with the Natural Resources and Environment Ministry, the bill proposes that any food product, whether animal feed, crop or animal, that contained genetically modified (GM) organisms must be approved by a new government panel as part of efforts to boost food security.

Malaysia, he said, had rich biodiversity resources and was concerned that unapproved variations might enter its food chain, with implications for human health and the environment.



Datuk Seri Mohd Radzi Sheikh Ahmad says Bio-safety Bill will ensure technology growth without compromising health