

# 'MOBILISE EFFORTS FOR AGRO-FOOD INNOVATION'

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PM urges researchers to spearhead R&D and drive innovation to improve standard of living

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**L**OCAL researchers have been urged to boost research and development (R&D), and drive innovation in the agro-food industry.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob said researchers in various fields of expertise should mobilise their efforts for the development of agro-food innovation to drive Malaysia towards a high-income nation, thus improving the living standards of the people.

"The government always en-

sures that efforts to increase productivity in the padi and rice industries are done proactively, including introducing the latest technologies to face challenges and further strengthening existing capabilities.

"However, this responsibility cannot be placed on the shoulders of the government and farmers alone. It requires joint efforts, (in the spirit of) inclusiveness and togetherness, which are the main thrusts of the Keluarga Malaysia concept."

He said this at the launch of a new padi variety, dubbed IS21, developed by Nuclear Malaysia in Sekinchan, here, yesterday.

Present were Selangor Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Amirudin Shari, Science, Technology and Innovation Minister Datuk Seri Dr Adham Baba, Agriculture and Food Industries Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ronald Kiandee and Entrepreneur Development and Co-operative Minister Tan Sri Noh Omar.

The IS21 padi variety is highly resistant to unpredictable weath-



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob visiting an exhibition hall at the launch of the IS21 padi variety developed by Nuclear Malaysia, in Sekinchan yesterday. PIC BY MOHAMAD SHAHRIL BADRI SAALI

er and several padi diseases that often affect farmers.

Ismail Sabri said the new padi variety also had the potential to return a high yield with lower planting costs, thus increasing the income of farmers if well managed.

"IS21 can produce up to nine tonnes of padi per hectare, depending on the cultivation area.

"Planting costs can be reduced by 10 to 20 per cent due to less use of fertilisers and pesticides. Yields can also increase by 40 to 67 per cent, depending on the cultivation area and the farmers' cultural practices."

The initiative by Nuclear Malaysia under the Science, Technology and Innovation Ministry, he added, was one of the efforts to improve the country's food security.

He said it was also in line with

the government's aim to increase the country's self-sufficiency in rice, thus reducing the dependency on imported rice.

The IS21 padi variety received recognition from the International Atomic Energy Agency and the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations at the former's 65th General Conference in Vienna, Austria, last September.

It was developed using the gamma radiation-induced mutation method, which is an alternative breeding technology to the conventional method, and has the capacity to produce agro-food crops with better characteristics.

"These include resistance to sudden weather changes, biotic and abiotic stresses, as well rapid yield production and better nutrient quality.

Meanwhile, Ismail Sabri said the cabinet had directed the Finance Ministry to look into the increase in the prices of fertilisers and pesticides.

He said the government was aware of the issue affecting farmers, adding that the matter was discussed in the cabinet.

"The high prices of fertilisers and pesticides affect the net profit of farmers, as most fertilisers and pesticides are imported.

"Even though local companies make these products, the raw materials are imported.

"However, the government will not remain silent and allow farmers to be burdened.

"We will see how the prices can be reduced or if aid needs to be given.

"The problems of the farmers are also the problems of the government. We will help."