

**Government To Focus On Increasing Productivity, Not Agricultural Areas: Najib Bernama
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PARIT BUNTAR, Jan 14 (Bernama) -- Malaysia will focus on increasing its food production capacity, and not agricultural areas, in its strategy to ensure food security, Prime Minister Datuk Najib Tun Razak said.

Through a change in the mindset among players in the sector, he said, the agricultural community would be able to increase their productivity, value add their product and increase their income.

The use of new technology, improvement in irrigation system and good farming practice would drive the initiative, he added.

"Finding a vast tract of land is not easy. Our focus, therefore, is to ensure every inch of agricultural land is developed optimally, using all the methods available, to increase productivity," he said when declaring open the National Farmers, Breeders and Fishermen's Day at the town field, here.

He said there was a need to focus on such strategy in view of the challenge faced in ensuring food security as the world population reaches seven billion.

Among the challenges faced by the sector were climate change and natural disasters such as the floods in Thailand which had destroyed 12.5 per cent of padi cultivation areas there, he said.

Najib described the transformation of the mind as more important than physical transformation, stressing that a lot can be achieved if there was a shift in people's mindset.

For instance, he said, a change in the mindset had resulted in a major success for the farmers who had embarked on a large-scale fresh prawn farming project at a former mining area in Tanjung Tualang, Kampar.

"I was told that the demand is so huge that there is a shortage in supply," he said.

He added that transformation requires farmers to no longer produce basic agricultural products but also to get involve in food processing and marketing.

"They should increase their presence throughout the supply chain," he said.

With the support of the government, Najib said, the sector would, without doubt, see a tremendous development.

"We don't want to regard agriculture as a gloomy sector or a low-productivity sector with people hardly able to provide for themselves," he said, adding that the government had approved RM14 billion since 2010 to transform the sector.

To a question at a news conference later about whether the government had been giving

more focus to Felda than the fishermen, breeders and farmers, Najib said: "Felda has had to go through a difficult period initially. It's not easy. The benefit comes later."

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