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CONFERENCE ON BIOTECHNOLOGY OF PLANTATION
COMMODITIES**

Bismillahirrahmanirrahim

Assalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh dan Selamat Sejahtera

Yang Berhormat
Datuk Peter Chin Fah Kui
Menteri Perusahaan Perladangan dan Komoditi,

Dif-dif kehormat,

Tuan-tuan dan Puan-puan,

1. Bersyukur kita ke hadrat Allah S.W.T. kerana dengan limpah kurnia dan izinNya, dapat kita semua berkumpul pada pagi ini. Saya amat berbesar hati kerana dapat bersama dengan tuan-tuan dan puan-puan di satu majlis yang amat bermakna bagi sektor perusahaan perladangan dan komoditi di negara kita.
2. Saya mengucapkan terima kasih kepada Kementerian Perusahaan Perladangan dan Komoditi (KPPK) yang telah sudi menjemput saya merasmikan Minggu Komoditi 2005 dan Conference on Biotechnology of Plantation Commodities ini. Syabas juga diucapkan kepada Kementerian di atas inisiatif menganjurkan Minggu Komoditi ini buat pertama kalinya.
3. Tidak dapat dinafikan bahawa sektor perladangan dan komoditi telah berperanan penting dalam mencorakkan pembangunan negara kita sejak dari zaman sebelum merdeka hinggalah sekarang. Bermula dengan tanaman kopi, di awal pemerintahan British dahulu, diikuti getah dan kemudiannya kelapa sawit, sektor perladangan dan komoditi telah berkembang pesat dan Malaysia kini merupakan pengeluar utama dunia bagi komoditi seperti minyak sawit, getah, kayu kayan dan koko.
4. Sumbangan signifikan sektor perladangan dan komoditi kepada ekonomi negara kita bukan sahaja perlu dikekalkan tetapi hendaklah dipertingkatkan dari masa ke semasa. Ini bermakna kita hendaklah menjalankan aktiviti-aktiviti nilai ditambah di keseluruhan rantai nilai atau value chain industri, daripada peringkat aktiviti hulu atau upstream kepada hiliran atau downstream. Langkah peningkatan daya saing akan meletakkan negara kita di tahap yang lebih kompetitif berbanding dengan negara-negara jiran yang juga menjadi pesaing dalam pengeluaran komoditi terutamanya Indonesia dan Thailand.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

5. I am delighted to be here today to officiate at the 2005 Conference on Biotechnology of Plantation Commodities. The participation of both the government and private sectors is evidence of the keen interest among industry players on the role of biotechnology in the plantation industry.

6. Biotechnology will undoubtedly play a significant role in Malaysia's economic development, particularly in the field of agriculture, food, medicine, the environment and ecology. In fact, biotechnology is an enabling technology for competitiveness and sustainability of the plantation industry.

7. It is hardly surprising that the Malaysian Government has earmarked biotechnology as the next engine of growth for the country. There is a huge potential in biotechnology, and the possibilities in harnessing the rich biodiversity in Malaysia are endless. Biotechnology offers enormous opportunities and immense potential in innovation, wealth creation and economic regeneration. If properly developed, it can create a revolutionary impact on our lives.

8. The Government's commitment towards the development of the biotechnology industry in Malaysia is reflected by the launching of the National Biotechnology Policy by the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Dato' Seri Abdullah bin Ahmad Badawi. The unveiling of the Biotechnology Policy reflects the Government's enthusiasm to act as a catalyst for the development of this technology in Malaysia. Indeed, the establishment of the Malaysian Biotechnology Corporation (MBC) as a one-stop agency dedicated to the development of the local biotechnology industry is a further testament to the Government's commitment.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

9. The major thrust of the National Biotechnology Policy is to transform and to enhance the value creation of the agriculture sector through biotechnology. The thrust outlined in the policy is in line with the Government's desire to promote agriculture as the third engine of growth in the country's economy. Plantation commodities have assumed an important role in spearheading the development of the agriculture sector in Malaysia.

10. In 2004, the plantation commodities, particularly oil palm and rubber, have helped the agriculture sector to achieve a growth of 5.3 per cent, which contributed 8.3 per cent to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In fact, the total revenue generated from the exports of the commodity sector was close to RM63 billion, making it a significant foreign exchange-earner for the national economy. I am confident that the plantation commodities will continue to spearhead the development of the agriculture sector in Malaysia for decades to come, providing an important source of revenue to the country. I believe the successes achieved by the plantation sector will help the Government fulfill its vision to make the agriculture sector one of the main driving forces of the country's economy.

11. As a main producer and exporter of plantation commodities such as palm oil, rubber and timber products, we have the technological advantage over our competitors with respect to production and processing. Through extensive R&D efforts, Malaysia has become the centre of excellence for good plantation practices, processing and downstream technologies, which is the envy of many countries. Malaysia is the benchmark for other palm oil and rubber producing countries of the world.

12. The excellent research and development (R&D) done by agencies such as the Malaysia Palm Oil Board, The Malaysian Rubber Board, The Malaysia Cocoa Board and The Pepper Marketing Board are commendable and I wish to acknowledge their

contributions.

13. Apart from the Government agencies, the private plantation industries in Malaysia have also made significant breakthroughs in R&D. The production of improved planting materials and the successful commercialization of the tissue culture processes for oil palm testify to the progress achieved. The Government is encouraged by the involvement of the plantation companies in R&D, and I believe this has contributed to the significant achievements made in this sector.

14. It is important to note that R&D findings will remain intangible as long as they are not commercialized. Therefore, efforts should be directed towards commercialization of research findings. In this regard, the Government is providing various incentives such as the Commercialization of R&D Funds (CRDF), Technology Acquisition Funds (TAF) and funds for venture capital to help commercialize R&D findings. I urge the industry to avail themselves of these incentives to increase the rate of R&D commercialization. I am happy to note the Conference is addressing the important subject of commercialization of biotechnology research.

15. Although it has been predicted that Malaysia will continue to be amongst the major producers of plantation commodities such as palm oil, rubber, timber products and cocoa for many years to come, strategies will need to be in place to increase productivity and produce high value-added products to maintain our competitive edge.

16. Biotechnology offers several means by which this potential can be realized. The enabling tools of this technology, such as genetic engineering, molecular probe technique and bio-transformation are potentially useful for enhancing the value of the products from the plantation sector. The use of biotechnology should represent the next stage of evolution in our relentless effort to remain competitive, especially in the agricultural commodities sector. This powerful technique offers great potential for agricultural sustainability through enhanced agronomic performance. I believe innovation in agricultural biotechnology will be the key factor in raising competitiveness in the new economic order, where there is reduced restriction on trade and much more competition among producing countries.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

17. The development of the first oil palm and rubber transgenic plants through genetic engineering, identification of the causal factors of latex allergy and harnessing of phenolics from palm oil waste are only a small segment of a long list of achievements. The emphasis on progress, continuous learning and innovation has enabled The Malaysian Palm Oil Board and The Malaysian Rubber Board to be world leaders in their respective fields of research.

18. In this context, the Government has recognized the existence of centre of excellence associated with biotechnology research in Malaysia. It is for this reason that in the New Biotechnology Policy, the Government has employed an approach that moves away from infrastructure focus to one that builds on the capabilities of existing institutions. The establishment of centre of excellence as part of "BioNexus", represents some of the best institutions that Malaysia has to offer in specific biotechnology sub-sectors.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

19. It is worth noting that in the United States alone, the revenue generated annually from the sales of agricultural biotechnology products is estimated to be over USD 2 billion. For Malaysia to harness this vast potential, it is imperative that there be greater collaboration between researchers and industry players in developing marketable biotechnology products. However, there appears to be a gap in moving research findings to commercialization and addressing this critical gap will be a major challenge.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

20. With globalization, the challenges are going to be increasingly complex. I am confident that with the harnessing of technological breakthroughs, the sector will continue to move forward. The Government on its part will assure strong support for R&D activities and human resource development, which is critical if Malaysia is to forge ahead in this competitive field of biotechnology. Although it is clear that the plantation sector, particularly oil palm and rubber, has built a strong and solid foundation for success in biotechnology research, it is my hope the scientists and industry players will synergize their efforts towards ensuring the sustainability of this industry by continuously improving their operations and processing techniques. Consistent with the theme of the Conference, i.e. "Biotechnology-Emerging Frontier for Plantation Commodities", biotechnology will lead our next wave of progress in the commodities sector.

Tuan-tuan dan Puan-puan,

21. Dalam usaha kita menerokai bidang teknologi baru seperti bioteknologi, kita juga harus mengambil kira kepentingan masyarakat umum. Pengenalan dan aplikasi teknologi tinggi seharusnya memberi kesan dan impak positif kepada semua pihak dari segi peningkatan daya saing ekonomi, pembangunan mampat dan kesejahteraan masyarakat, termasuk bagi golongan pekebun kecil. Kerajaan amat berharap kemajuan di bidang bioteknologi dapat memanfaatkan golongan pekebun kecil dari segi membantu menghasilkan bahan tanaman yang berkualiti tinggi, sekaligus berjaya meningkatkan produktiviti, pendapatan dan taraf sosioekonomi mereka kelak.

22. Sekali lagi saya mengucapkan syabas kepada Kementerian Perusahaan Perladangan dan Komoditi di atas inisiatif menganjurkan Minggu Komoditi 2005 dan Conference on Biotechnology of Plantation Commodities ini. Dengan itu, saya dengan lafaz Bismillahirrahmanirrahim merasmikan Minggu Komoditi 2005 dan juga Conference on Biotechnology of Plantation Commodities.

Sekian, terima kasih.

Wabillahi Taufiq Walhidayah Wassalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh.