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> FOOD PRODUCTION

Do more to be self-sufficient

AS the world stock markets face uncertainties and national economies begin to suffer hyperinflation, the Malaysian government has moved "to minimise the impact of rising prices on the people's cost of living and purchasing power".

Deputy Prime Minister Daruk Seri Najib Razak has announced the establishment of the National Price Council "to create a national stockpile of essential goods and commodities as a safeguard against the impact of rising prices" ("Buffer against rising prices" — NST, Jan 24).

While this intention to defend the general welfare is excellent, the government needs to take immediate measures to secure essential food imports such as wheat and corn.

Even after suffering starvation under the Japanese Occupation, when essential food imports were blocked during World War 2, Malaysia has not learnt the lesson of food security and still imports half of its food.

Half of the nation's human carbohydrate consumption comes from imported wheat, while all of the feed for the chicken, egg and pork industries comes from imported corn. With producing countries banning exports of wheat and corn, there is an urgent need for Malaysia to abandon the normal monetary channels.

We must resort to government-to-government barter trading to secure our imports of corn and wheat, without which the population of 27 million will

face starvation. Malaysia can barter its palm oil with countries like India and China in return for wheat and corn.

This operation will allow Malaysia to undertake a crash science programme to rapidly increase agricultural production with 21st century technology.

Malaysia is making belated but important attempts to industrialise its agriculture to achieve food self-sufficiency.

In a radical departure from the 10,000-year-old grazing system, a new commercial dairy farm under construction plans to lead the way for milk self-sufficiency. A new generation of agricultural entrepreneurs recognises the hopelessness of trying to adapt high-producing domestic ani-

mals from temperate climates to the humid tropics.

Instead, they put these top temperate breeds, improved over centuries through science, into economical enclosed animal houses with a controlled Mediterranean climate. This allows cows to grow and produce milk at maximum rates while reducing mortality from tropical diseases.

The feedlot cows can be fed mainly on grass. Malaysia, with no winter, plenty of sunshine, rainfall and a constantly humid environment, has the world's highest rate of biomass production. Improved, highly nutritious grasses can now be grown, cut nine times per year and fed to cows, sheep, goats and cattle.

This intensive system, combined with sperm banks and modern farming technology from New Zealand and Australia, will allow the abundant land in Malaysia to not only feed its own population but supply world markets with top quality milk and prime lamb and beef.

The newly emerging intensive-animal production system can be exported to other hot climates, even desert countries. Water is the only missing ingredient which the return to nuclear power can economically generate from seawater in large quantities for irrigating grass farms.

The small and modestly priced Pebble Bed nuclear reactors from South Africa, the floating nuclear power plants

from Russia and the proposed thorium reactors from India can transform impoverished developing countries and allow advanced farmers to feed the growing populations.

Malaysia experienced the destruction of its economy through hyperinflation and starvation during the Japanese Occupation when the price of one egg escalated from three cents to an impossible \$34 with the furious printing of "banana money".

History must not be allowed to repeat itself. Malaysia needs a crash science programme to massively boost food production, for local consumption and exports.

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