

'FOOD NATIONALISM'

'BOOST AGRICULTURAL OUTPUT INSTEAD'

Nations helping each other does not make them vulnerable but stronger, says analyst

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COUNTRIES must strengthen regional cooperation and solidarity as they grapple with rampant and worsening food and energy shortages.

Institut Masa Depan Malaysia (Masa) chief executive officer Azril Mohd Amin said countries should step up agricultural production instead of restricting exports during trying times.

"Malaysia has emerged from the worst wave of the Covid-19 pandemic and continues to make strides in terms of economic recovery. But we are now confronted by a tsunami of challenges stemming from the Russia-Ukraine war and effective removal of Russia from the global economy.

"We are increasingly going to see developing countries adopting policies of 'food nationalism' and 'energy protectionism', and every nation's self-sufficiency is going to become paramount.

"At the same time, we must maintain and strengthen regional



A worker preparing to feed chickens at a farm in Padang Terap, Kedah, recently. Institut Masa Depan Malaysia (Masa) chief executive officer Azril Mohd Amin (inset) says countries should step up agricultural production instead of restricting exports in times of crisis. PIC BY LUQMAN HAKIM ZUBIR

cooperation and solidarity, understanding that helping each other does not make us vulnerable but stronger, and self-sufficiency is not the same as isolation.

"We must be guided by the Prophetic tradition that says, 'He is not a believer whose stomach is filled while his neighbour goes hungry'.

"What this requires in practical terms is not more agricultural export restrictions, but rather, greater production, perhaps reinvigorating subsistence farming alongside farming for exportation," he said.

Azril proposed this during the "Role of Youths in Civilisation and Sustainability" forum organised by Universiti Malaya's Cen-

tre for Civilisational Dialogue (UMCCD) here yesterday.

The Russia-Ukraine war that erupted on Feb 24 had led to acute food shortages, and several countries had imposed export restrictions on crucial food items.

India, for example, banned wheat exports this month and a few days later, capped sugar exports to 10 million tonnes for the current marketing year to September.

Azril said Malaysia must consider and prepare for the effects of events like the Russia-Ukraine war on the country and region.

"Events like the war in Ukraine, and more specifically the isolation of Russia — which is creating a global economic disaster of immeasurable proportions — must

be understood in the context of this historic transition of world power dynamics.

"From the beginning, Malaysia has been a nation deeply protective of our sovereignty and independence, and we have always resisted polarisation in international relations.

"As a member of the Non-Aligned Movement, or NAM, we have always maintained a wise self-interest impartiality in world affairs, which is necessary to preserve our autonomy and safeguard our national interests.

"This ethos of non-alignment and of independence may make us the target of pressure and criticism from those who wish to make us take sides. But it also

makes us invulnerable to bullying," he said.

The current crisis, Azril said, had also highlighted the need to replace globalisation with greater economic regionalisation.

"Our importance as a consumer group, a labour and talent pool, a source of natural wealth and human potential, is making our nation and region the geopolitical and economic centre of the world.

"We must be prepared to make bold changes in charting the way forward to promote an inclusive sustainability agenda in line with the 2030 Agenda of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and in the context of Malaysia, the Wawasan Kemakmuran Bersama, or 2030 Shared Prosperity Vision.

"Adopting a whole of nation approach enables us to synergise our efforts towards advocating and accelerating SDGs in the local context, particularly in areas of sustainable financing, climate action and technology.

"For example, in the additive manufacturing sector and 3D printing, Malaysia has recognised phenomenal economic potential while adhering to the three fundamental Rs of sustainability — reduce, reuse and recycle.

"Localisation of SDGs obliges us to engage discussions at the grassroots level by encouraging participation of the youth in the creative implementation of the SDGs," he added.

Page 1 pic: A man carrying a bale of wheat during the harvest in a village in Egypt's Giza province recently.

Risda targets maize as animal feed

KUALA LUMPUR: Efforts are under way to aggressively promote the cultivation of maize as animal feed to reduce the country's reliance on imports.

The initiative is also geared towards addressing rising food prices, said Rural Development Minister Datuk Seri Mahdzir Khalid.

He said the Rubber Industry Smallholders Development Authority (Risda) would assist its planters to breed poultry and livestock.

"We have launched an incentive scheme with Risda to encourage the cultivation of crops, such as corn used in animal feed, to address rising food prices.

"We encourage small rubber planters to diversify their plant-

ing portfolios instead of relying on rubber as their sole income," Mahdzir said at a Hari Raya Aidilfitri open house at the Risda headquarters in Jalan Ampang here yesterday.

Present was Risda chairman Datuk Seri Mohd Salim Mohd Sharif.

A pilot project, he said, had been started in Perlis in February involving 750,000 maize plants in a 15ha plantation.

This, he said, was estimated to produce 82 tonnes of corn in six months during the July harvest.

"We have allocated RM20,000 each, under the Risda agricultural and food programme, for 1,000 farmers this year for the purpose.

"The programme will involve short- and long-term farming, as

well as one catered for rearing poultry and livestock," Mahdzir said.

The short-term programme would focus on growing maize, while the long-term concentrated on oil palm and rubber plantations. The one on poultry and livestock was targeted towards rearing chicken and cattle.

Mahdzir announced the initiatives after the recent skyrocketing prices of food and commodities. The increased cost had resulted in the government responding with remedial measures that included the abolition of approved permits (AP) for essential food imports.

The government had announced a temporary ban on chicken exports from June 1 to



Rural Development Minister Datuk Seri Mahdzir Khalid (fourth from right) attending a Hari Raya Aidilfitri open house at the Risda headquarters in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. PIC BY AZIAH AZMEE

meet local demand and to stabilise prices.

Salim said Risda's short-term programme would provide rubber planters with an alternate source of income while their plantations were being restored.

"Risda will provide the rubber planters with maize seeds, to-

gether with the assurance of buying their crops upon harvest.

"Likewise, we will assist the rubber planters in chicken and cattle breeding, which can help meet local market demands."

Another assistance for rubber planters, Salim said, was in the form of the Monsoon Season Aid.