

Bernas should not blame others

IN the latest furore over the rice shortage and the growing concern over food insecurity, Bernas, the country's sole rice importer and distributor, has put the blame on private commercial millers ("Bernas: Go after private millers, too" — NST, May 8).

Bernas should look at the mandate that it was given by the country.

Having had its monopoly extended to 2012, Bernas must show it can do its job to ensure that the rice supply is there at all times for the people.

As stated on its webpage, Bernas claims responsibility to "ensure the maintenance of a sufficient supply of rice at reasonably fair and stable prices. The company's obligations under the privatisation agreement also includes the maintenance of the rice stockpile".

Part of the responsibility also includes the management of rice millers. Bernas' pointing fingers at commercial millers simply shows it is not an effective body to co-ordinate the players in the rice market.

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Think again

THE government should be cautious about going for 100 per cent self-sufficiency in rice production as the high prices and apparent shortage in the international market may only be temporary.

Farmers around the world will likely increase production to take advantage of the high prices and within two or three rice-growing cycles, there may be an oversupply in the market causing prices to drop.

Consequently, the government may end up having to pay out more in subsidies to support farmers.

Instead of opening up new padi land in Sarawak and elsewhere, the government should rehabilitate abandoned and under-utilised land as it can be done quickly and cheaply.

The long-term solution to rice security is to find ways to substantially increase the income of local rice farmers.

One way to achieve this objective is by getting farmers to form small agro companies to lower production costs and diversify to raise their incomes and better cope with price instability.

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