



UMS graduates with family and friends.

'Country's strength assessed through food production'

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KOTA KINABALU: The strength of a country can be assessed based on its ability to produce sufficient, safe and nutritious food sources, said Sabah Head of State Tun Juar Mahiruddin.

The Chancellor of Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) said the issue brought awareness to the importance of agriculture to guarantee food security, at the same time generating economy of the people and the country.

However, he said food production has become more challenging due to unpredictable weather, resource constraints, the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and international conflicts.

"Therefore, food production capacity and access to food need to be increased to meet current needs," he said when officiating the 24th UMS Convocation Ceremony at the UMS Chancellor's Hall here on Saturday.

Juar said that the agricultural sector, i.e. crops, animal farming and fisheries, is the main sector in the state of Sabah and is even able to contribute as much as 16.5 percent to Sabah's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2020.

However, it has not been able



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to meet domestic demand for major food commodities such as rice, fruits, vegetables and meat.

"Therefore, our country is too dependent on food imports, raising the country's food import bill in 2020 to RM55.4 billion," he said.

In order to ensure a guaranteed food supply, Juar said Sabah has established the Sabah Agricultural Action Plan (2021-2030) in parallel with the third Sabah State Agricultural Policy (2017-2026).

He said the implementation of the Sabah Agricultural Action Plan is based on four main

principles, namely production, innovation, sustainability and human capital development.

He said that the effort is in line with UMS which actively promotes precise and smart high-tech agriculture through the Faculty of Sustainable Agriculture (FPL) determined to produce graduates in the field of high-tech agriculture.

According to him, FPL is developing a Bachelor's Program in Smart Precision Agriculture Technology that will be offered from next year.

"This initiative from UMS can make a big contribution in

the agriculture sector, and can indirectly contribute to food stability and create guaranteed employment opportunities for graduates," he added.

A total of 4,298 graduates will receive their scrolls at the convocation ceremony that will be held for three days from Saturday.

The graduates include 3,798 receiving their bachelor's degree, master's degree (271) and doctorate (92).

There are also 73 diploma graduates and 64 post-diploma graduates who completed their studies this year.