

MAHATHIR-RICE
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ALOR STAR, MARCH 9 (BERNAMA) — DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER (DATUK SERI DR. MAHATHIR MOHAMAD SAID TODAY THE GOVERNMENT WOULD CONTINUE RESTRICTING THE ENTRY OF FOREIGN RICE INTO THE COUNTRY TO ALLOW LOCAL PADI FARMERS TO SELL THEIR PRODUCE IN A CLOSED MARKET.

HE SAID THE RESTRICTION ON THE ENTRY OF RICE FROM THAILAND, CHINA, INDONESIA AND BANGLADESH WOULD BE CONTINUED ALTHOUGH THE GOVERNMENT WAS LOSING IN TERMS OF IMPORT DUTY.

THE GOVERNMENT WOULD CONTINUE GIVING SERIOUS ATTENTION TO LOOKING AFTER THE INTERESTS OF PADI FARMERS UNTIL SUCH TIME THAT THEY WERE REALLY EARNING HIGHER INCOMES THAN IN THE PAST.

THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER SAID THIS AT THE HANDING-OVER OF MACHINERY AND FERTILISER FOR FARMERS AT THE GERAKTANI COMPLEX IN KOBAN, ABOUT 16 MILES FROM HERE.

HE SAID THE GOVERNMENT WAS INTENSIFYING EFFORTS TO INCREASE PADI PRODUCTION AND AT THE SAME TIME REDUCE PRODUCTION COSTS SO THAT FARMERS COULD INCREASE THEIR INCOMES. — BERNAMA MORE 1750/S7
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HE HAD DIRECTED THE MUDA AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY (MADA) TO INTRODUCE DIRECT SOWING OF PADI INSTEAD OF TRANSPLANTING SEEDLINGS FROM NURSERIES TO THE PLOT.

BY USING THIS METHOD, FARMERS WOULD CUT DOWN LABOUR COSTS.

DATUK SERI DR. MAHATHIR SAID THAT SINCE GROUP CULTIVATION WAS INTRODUCED IN KAMPUNG ASSAM JAWA LAST YEAR, THE YIELD OF PADI THERE HAD INCREASED BY 10 PER CENT.

IN JAWI ENDOI IN PERLIS WHERE THIS SYSTEM OF CULTIVATION WAS ALSO PRACTISED, THE OUTPUT HAD INCREASED BY 37 PER CENT.

HE SAID IT WAS TRUE THAT PADI FARMERS WOULD OBTAIN BETTER PROFITS IF THE GOVERNMENT WERE TO INCREASE PADI PRICES.

HOWEVER, IF THE GOVERNMENT WERE TO DO THIS, THE PRICE OF RICE WOULD ALSO INCREASE AND THIS WOULD BADLY AFFECT THE 13.5 MILLION PEOPLE IN THE COUNTRY, ESPECIALLY THOSE IN THE LOWER INCOME GROUP, WHEREAS THE BENEFITS WOULD ONLY ACCRUE TO ONLY ABOUT 500,000 PADI FARMERS. — BERNAMA MORE 1753/SZ

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KEDAH MENTRI BESAR DATUK SERI SYED NAHAR SHAHABUDDIN SAID THAT SINCE DOUBLE-CROPPING WAS INTRODUCED IN THE MADA AREA, PADI PRODUCTION HAD INCREASED FROM 314,000 TONS TO 800,000 TONS A YEAR. AT THE SAME TIME, FARMERS' INCOME HAD ALSO INCREASED.

ACCORDING TO A STUDY BY MADA, THE AVERAGE INCOME OF PADI FARMERS HAD INCREASED FROM \$1,026 IN 1966 TO \$2,162 IN 1972/73, \$4,961 IN 1975 AND \$5,202 IN 1978/79.

THE VALUE OF PADI LAND HAD ALSO INCREASED FROM \$800 A RELONG PRIOR TO THE COMPLETION OF THE MUDA IRRIGATION SCHEME TO \$5,000 AT PRESENT. — BERNAMA 1755/SZ