

Change attitude, PM tells farmers

By G. DANAPAL

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BATU PAHAT, Fri. — Farmers should not treat lightly the Government's commitment towards improving agricultural productivity through efficient farming techniques and modern technology, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

Opening the Integrated Agricultural Development Centre at Sri Medan, 24km from here, the Prime Minister said it was the Government's intention to eventually reduce the number of farmers in the agricultural sector without affecting productivity.

It was, therefore, necessary for farmers to change their attitude towards farming and equip themselves with adequate knowledge of modern farming techniques.

The Government was now geared towards industrialisation and needed sufficient manpower.

He said it would be pointless for the Government to continue rendering assistance if the farmers did not derive any benefit.

Self-sufficient

However, if farmers were receptive to modern techniques then the Government would always be prepared to come up with the necessary assistance such as funds.

Dr Mahathir said the country's agricultural system was still not efficient because farmers had been in the habit of waiting for the Government to do everything for them.

Urging them to be responsible, he said the Government was not being too strict on the question of giving them grants.

'Explosive welcome'

for Mahathir

SENAL, Fri. — Thousands of people who turned up at the Sultan Ismail Airport to welcome Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad this morning were a little shaken by a small blast.

However, they were relieved when they learnt that the "blast" was the sound of 20 balloons bursting.

Some thought the sound was that of a gun salute for Dr Mahathir.

The blast took place when a Gerakan party member tried to release the 20 Gerakan balloons into the air.

Finding the strings entangled, he used the end of a lighted cigarette to loosen them. In the process of doing so, the balloons "exploded".

Two people at the scene had slight burns while three others suffered light injuries.

"We need to have the money first before we can ever think of giving farmers funds for development of agricultural projects and we have also got to make sure that whatever we give will bring them benefits directly."

He said there were countries which had been successful in applying modern and efficient farming techniques resulting in those countries becoming not only self-sufficient but also having surplus for export.

Citing the United States as an example, he said the country started out with 95 per cent of the population involved in the agricultural sector.

The farmers were able to produce enough to feed themselves and the five per cent of the population in the industrial sector.

But now, the farming population in the US is just five per cent and yet it was able to feed the 260 million people, of whom 95 per cent were in the industrial sector. Apart from being self-sufficient the US was also able to export agricultural produce.

This was the kind of dream that Malaysia was cherishing and this could only be achieved if farmers adopted efficient farming techniques.

On the \$200 million required for the development of the West Johore Agricultural Project under the Fifth Malaysia Plan, Dr Mahathir said the Government was still in the process of studying details of the second phase of the project.

It was the duty of the Government to ensure that areas in the country which needed to be developed would receive the necessary attention.

Flood-prone

The Prime Minister also took note of the complaints of Sri Medan residents on the flood problem in the area.

"The name Sri Medan sounds nice but just because it is affected by floods it does not mean you have to change the name", he said in a lighter vein, adding that what was more important was the attitude of the Sri Medan people in facing challenges.

Just because Sri Medan was flood-prone it did not mean that the area was useless for agriculture. In fact, there were areas in other parts of the country which did not have flood problems and yet they were not productive, he said.

Earlier, the Prime Minister and Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah were given a rousing traditional welcome when they landed at the field of the Sekolah Menengah Sri Medan. More than 10,000 people greeted them.