

Don't depend only on palm oil, Felda told

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KOTA TINGGI, Sat. — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has told Felda to diversify and not be totally dependent on rubber and palm oil.

He said that if Felda settlers depended solely on palm oil, they would be badly hit when world market prices fell.

But if several other crops were planted, Felda could then cushion the price fall of any one of its primary produce, he said today at

the opening of a school at Felda Air Tawar Dua, about 20km from here.

Dr Mahathir advised Felda to be realistic and not think it could sell anything it produced.

He reminded settlers about the history of rubber, saying that many plantations had come up based on the belief that the more cars produced, the more rubber would be needed for tyres.

He said that when rubber

prices went up, the developed countries invented synthetic rubber.

The same could happen to other agricultural produce, he warned.

Dr Mahathir advised the people to make full use of all available resources including land instead of letting them lie idle.

He suggested they plant whatever crops they could so that they would not have to spend money to buy the crops they had planted.

He said Felda was formed to enable the people to earn better incomes than they could as small-holders.

"Under this scheme, Felda is the largest estate in the world and is very successful," he added to an applause from more than 10,000 people who had gathered to welcome the Prime Minister.

Dr Mahathir said since Felda was so successful, many people were on the waiting list to join these land schemes.

He also directed Felda to study a proposal that all future settlers who wished to join the schemes should do their own clearing, nursery and planting until they can reap the fruits of their own labour.

He pointed out that in the past, Felda had employed contractors to do everything up to harvesting time before bringing in the settlers to enjoy a ready-made plantation.

He assured the Felda settlers that the Government would look into their appeal for electricity.

Dr Mahathir was on his first official visit to Johore since he became Prime Minister in 1981.

He opened a primary school and later visited an exhibition. He then opened a petrol kiosk, a mini-market and visited stalls operated by Felda settlers.

He left for Kuala Lumpur after attending mid-day prayers here.