

Gold mine in deep-sea fishing: PM

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KUALA TERENGGANU, Sun. — The Prime Minister today blamed the brouhaha over the deep-sea fishing venture between Malaysia and Thailand on certain elements including politicians out to exploit the teething problems experienced by the enterprise.

He advised them to "cease and desist" as the venture had many advantages in terms of the skills that could be acquired and the revenue that could be gained by the country. The venture was a gold mine in more ways than one.

By taking advantage of some of the grievances of the local fishermen they were only making selfish political gains.

He assured fishermen that the venture was beneficial to them as through it they could acquire the resources and skills to exploit the Exclusive Economic Zone without outside assistance later.

The Prime Minister was speaking at the opening of Sekolah Menengah Ajil, about 32km from here. Most of those present were fishermen and their families.

He was accompanied by Menteri Besar Datuk Haji Wan Mokhtar Ahmad, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Dr Yusof Nor, Deputy Primary Industries Minister Alias Ali and other State dignitaries.

He also gave an assurance that the activities of the deep-sea venture would not intrude into areas meant for traditional fishermen.

Later at a Press conference to mark the

end of his two-day official visit, he said he would ask the relevant authorities to look into complaints that there had been intrusions by between 150 and 1,000 foreign fishing boats in the area and that some had even intruded inshore.

On allegations that nine of the 40 K & I (the company co-operating with Thai company White Star in the deep-sea venture) boats had landed their catch of tuna in Songkhla in south Thailand rather than in Kuantan, he said:

"This does not coincide with the information I got. I was informed that 37 boats had landed their catch in Kuantan."

Tax collected

In Kuantan, the fish are iced, packed and taxed before they are taken by the same boats to Thailand.

He said the fish could be landed at any port in Terengganu or Pahang because the tax was collected by the Federal Government.

"What we want is for them to use other boats that can carry containers of the fish to Thailand instead of using the same boats."

Dr Mahathir said as far as he knew the venture was a success in terms of the catch brought in so far. Tuna was not a favourite among Malaysians and was suitable for export.

The Prime Minister and his wife left for Pulau Perhentian this afternoon and will leave for Kuala Lumpur tomorrow afternoon.