

THE NUTTY IDEA THAT BECAME MONEY-SPINNER

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LANGKAWI, Sat. — Everyone thought that the Agriculture Minister was being nutty when he started the campaign to promote coconuts which featured, among other things, a "Mat Jenin Coconut Tree Climbing Contest" and a speech by an elderly "Don Juan" who said drinking young coconut water had never affected his virility.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that even he thought it was funny.

But coconut farmers were now laughing all the way to the bank.

The Prime Minister, launching the International Coconut Festival here, praised Datuk Seri Sanusi Junid for the idea, saying it worked so well that "prices have gone up to

such a level that the Government is no longer subsidising coconut growers."

But he added that there was still room for improvement and called for research to find more uses for coconuts and to find ways of promoting its sale overseas.

Handicraft industry

Dr Mahathir said there was considerable potential for coconut-based delicacies. Coconut cookies, for example, could become popular in Western countries if properly marketed.

He also said a profitable handicraft industry could be developed

with the use of coconut parts.

Ten producer countries, besides Malaysia, are taking part in the festival. They are Bangladesh, Philippines, Fiji, the United States, Indonesia, Maldives, Papua New Guinea, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Western Samoa.

Among the activities in the two-day affair are cultural shows, a semi-r and a coconut tree climbing competition.

Datuk Seri Sanusi Junid also spoke at the launching. He said another aim of the festival was to promote Langkawi as a popular tourist resort.

He suggested that the festival be held annually and hosted on a rotation basis by producer countries.