

Mahathir's advice BT - 9 AUG 1988 to Felda

By OUR REPORTER

THE Federal Land Development Authority (Felda) should emulate the measures adopted by private plantations which have been managed efficiently and are productive, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said last night.

Speaking at a dinner hosted by Felda to confer awards on outstanding settlers and managers, he said there is nothing to stop authority from being as effective and efficient as plantations although Felda schemes are not ordinary estates.

"We are aware that Felda's strategies are formulated based on a combination of those for smallholdings and estates. The easy way for Felda is to do what the smallholders normally do. The job is lighter and the pressure less.

"But if this is the practice, surely there is no progress. Therefore, Felda has to emulate the actions taken by the plantations in the private sector," he said.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said the Government has continued to allocate large sum of money to Felda as its projects are meant to improve the livelihood of the people and for development.

But as Felda expands, the costs to develop and administer Felda schemes have been increasing, and these can represent a heavy burden on the Government, especially at times when revenues are low.

"I am not saying the Government should run away from its responsibility. But the fact is, the private plantations are making profit although they use their own revenue to meet all management expenditure and loan repayments.

"Even during low commodity prices, private plantations are able to meet their financial liabilities using their earnings. They do not get any advance from anyone," the Prime Minister said.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir added that the Government is answerable not only to the Felda settlers, but also to other communities such as farmers, fishermen and other rural folks. It is thus unfair if the Government has to always assist one group at the expense of others.

"At times when commodity prices are depressed, Government's assistance is proper. But when prices for commodities like rubber and palm oil are at high levels, such assistance should not continue.

"Prices of rubber and palm oil have now rebounded. If Government's spending can be stopped or reduced, we will have more money for those who are not benefiting from the uptrend," he said.