

We cannot ignore estate sector, says Dr M

By Sulochini Nair

PETALING JAYA, Fri. — The country cannot afford to neglect the estate sector and become over-dependent on manufacturing industries, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

Estates must be retained as insurance against adverse effects felt by the manufacturing sector.

Addressing more than 1,000 Felda settler representatives and staff here, Dr Mahathir said they should prepare for the fu-

ture when the agricultural scenario would be different.

The educated children of settlers were unlikely to return to small and possibly inefficient farms which held little meaning for them compared with more lucrative wages in the city.

In spite of this, he said the country needed the produce of the estates.

He said the results of the division of Felda estates under the management of individual settlers were very disappointing.

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If we wish to benefit from the division of Felda estates, these estates should be integrated (again) and managed as a single large entity."

He said the income of large estates in the country, which were only half the size of the total area of small estates, was double the income of the small estates.

The Prime Minister said some of the children of Felda settlers should return to the schemes to provide efficient management

and not look down on this profession.

Dr Mahathir also told the settlers that their concept of land ownership should change with the times.

"The wish to own land merely because of a desire for land is no longer relevant under present conditions.

"What is important is the income derived from developing the land and how it is utilised for maximum benefit."

He said land ownership should be through the hold-

ing of shares as would be the case in new Felda schemes where settlers would be offered shares.

Too many land areas held under the *faraid* (Islamic land ownership) system were unproductive because of difficulties in developing or selling such land due to multiple ownership, difficulties in managing the land and owners who were difficult to locate.

He said the *faraid* laws were not at fault here. Those to blame were Muslims who did not know or did not want to put it into

practice without losing out.

Even without ownership problems, he said, the management of such land was not beneficial to Muslims.

The Government, he said, was concerned that Felda land might fall into others' hands because they were unproductive and their owners were no longer interested in farming the land.

Dr Mahathir went on to open the Asrama Semal Bakti in Kelana Jaya, a hostel for Felda settlers' children, and presented Felda Investment Co-oper-

ative share certificates worth \$30 million for Felda settlers and staff their representatives.

The non-negotiable shares are for 119,299 settlers and 22,707 employees.

Each individual gets \$200.

Felda group chairman Raja Tan Sri Mohamed Alias Raja Mohamed Ali said the money was allocated by Felda's profit-making corporations.

□ PICTURE IN P5