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BATU PAHAT, JULY 21 (BERNAMA) -- PRIME MINISTER DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR MOHAMAD SAID WITH A POPULATION GROWING BY 360,000 ANNUALLY, THE NATION NEEDS TO ENSURE THAT ITS AGRICULTURE SECTOR CAN SUPPLY ENOUGH FOOD FOR THE PEOPLE EVEN DURING EMERGENCY.

A COUNTRY RELYING WHOLLY ON IMPORTED FOOD HAD NOT ACHIEVED TRUE INDEPENDENCE IN THE ACTUAL SENSE, HE SAID WHEN HE OPENED THE JOHOR FARMERS, LIVESTOCK BREEDERS AND FISHERMEN'S DAY CELEBRATIONS HERE TODAY.

ACCORDING TO CURRENT PROJECTIONS, THE GOVERNMENT MIGHT MEET ITS OBJECTIVE OF HAVING A 70-MILLION POPULATION FOR THE COUNTRY BY THE YEAR 2035 INSTEAD OF 2085 AS ORIGINALLY TARGETED, HE SAID.

MALAYSIA HAD NO EXCUSE TO NEGLECT THE AGRICULTURE SECTOR WHILE SIMULTANEOUSLY HIGHLIGHTING THE MANUFACTURING SECTOR AS AGRO-BASED INDUSTRIES REQUIRED LESS CAPITAL INPUT BECAUSE OF SOIL FERTILITY, HE SAID.

+IT IS TRUE THAT WE SHALL CONTINUE IMPORTING PART OF OUR FOOD REQUIREMENT, BUT WHAT WE WANT IS EVEN IF SUPPLY IS CUT OFF, WE HAVE DOMESTIC RESOURCES TO DEPEND ON TO AVOID FAMINE,+ HE SAID.-- MORE
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THE PRIME MINISTER SAID IT WAS IMPORTANT THAT THE GOVERNMENT CONTINUE GIVING EMPHASIS TO THE AGRICULTURE SECTOR AND DEVISE MEANS TO ENSURE GUARANTEED FOOD SUPPLY AND BETTER RETURNS FOR FARMERS.

+WE SHALL PROCEED MORE DETERMINEDLY TO ENSURE THAT FARMERS AND FISHERMEN ARE NOT NEGLECTED IN EFFORTS TO BOOST THEIR INCOME ALTHOUGH THE MANUFACTURING SECTOR TOO OFFER GOOD OPPORTUNITIES,+ HE SAID.

THE PRIME MINISTER SAID AGRICULTURAL POLICES MUST BE STREESSED UPON SO THAT THE SECTOR COULD BE MORE EFFICIENT TO REMAIN A VITAL SECTOR OF THE ECONOMY.

DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR SAID THE NATION WAS PROMOTING MANUFACTURING INDUSTRIES TO CREATE MORE JOBS FOR THE POPULATION EXPECTED TO REACH 20 MILLION BY THE YEAR 2000.

IN HIS SPEECH, AGRICULTURE MINISTER DATUK SERI SANUSI JUNID SAID THE GOVERNMENT'S FUTURE POVERTY ERADICATION PROGRAMMES WOULD INCORPORATE ECONOMICS AND RELIGIOUS ASPECTS.

TOWARDS THIS END, THE GOVERNMENT NEEDED A NEW MANDATE FROM THE PEOPLE TO IMPLEMENT PROJECTS ALREADY DRAWN UP, HE SAID: -- MORE
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MORE THAN 5,000 FARMERS AND FISHERMEN GREETED THE PRIME MINISTER AND HIS WIFE DATUK SERI DATIN PADUKA DR SITI HASMAH ALI AMIDST KOMPANG BEATS, KUDA KEPANG DANCES AND BUNGA MANGGAR BEARERS.

THE CELEBRATIONS BEGAN WITH A PLEDGE BY 1,500 FARMERS AND FISHERMEN.

DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR PRESENTED PRIZES AND CERTIFICATES TO THE STATE TOP FARMERS, ENCIK KASTUMI RAUYAN AND PUAN RONIRAH KUSNI.

THE PRIME MINISTER AND OTHER DIGNITARIES INCLUDING MENTERI BESAR TAN SRI HAJI MUHYIDDIN YASSIN LATER TOURED DISPLAY STALLS PUT UP BY GOVERNMENT AGENCIES AND THE PRIVATE SECTOR.-- BERNAMA