

# PM: We won't forsake farmers and fishermen

BATU PAHAT, Sat. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the Government will not forsake the farming and fishing community in its quest for industrial development.

"Food production will continue to be given importance. In fact, the Government has plans to improve the agricultural sector by increasing productivity while gradually reducing the number of those involved in the sector," he told a gathering here when launching Farmers Day.

The Prime Minister said now that land was becoming scarce, the Government was forced to ex-

pand other economic activities such as manufacturing.

"Before independence our population was only about seven million. There was much land for agriculture. Now, our population is 17.7 million."

He said the population target of 70 million by the year 2085 would be achieved by the year 2035.

In view of this, he said, new technology must be introduced to food production and productivity has to increase.

Dr Mahathir said those involved in food production should ensure that the population did not

starve if the country's foreign food sources stopped supplies.

He cited Middle East countries as an example of self-sufficiency in food production. The Prime Minister said these nations were now farming their deserts to reduce dependency on food imports.

Dr Mahathir urged farmers not to be jealous of traders selling their produce at high prices overseas.

He said that although the farmers were paid small amounts, their profit margin was much higher considering the high overhead cost incurred by the traders.