

# Dr M keen on aid fund for farmers

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JITRA, Thurs. — The Government will consider a proposal by the Kedah Farmers Organisation (PPN) to set up a Farmers Aid Fund, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said the Government was prepared to consider the proposal since the PPN said the fund would benefit farmers affected by natural catastrophes.

He was speaking to reporters after attending a closed-door meeting with the PPN committee at the Kubang Pasu Religious Complex here.

"We are considering the proposal and we have suggested to the PPN at today's meeting that affected farmers be paid 'ringgit-for-ringgit', according to their contributions," he said.

The New *Straits Times* reported last June that the idea for such a fund was mooted by the chairman of the PPN, Encik Badri Haji Yunus, and to be drawn up with the State Government's assistance.

Farmers, whose crops, fruit plantations and other crops were damaged by natural catastrophes, such as flood or drought would get compensation from the fund.

It would also save the State Government millions of ringgit a year which was used to pay farmers whose crops were damaged.

Dr Mahathir also said the State Government had given the PPN a piece of land to build the Wisma Peladang to house a hotel, but the PPN did not have the funds to proceed with the project.

The Government had also suggested that the PPN liaise with other bodies to get funds for the project.

Asked whether a farmers' bank should be set up, Dr Mahathir said this had been suggested before.

He said it was normal for such suggestions to be made but problems could not be solved even if 10 agencies were set up.

"The problem is the weakness in the management of such bodies. If the problems are not overcome or if management techniques are not understood, nothing will be solved," added Dr Mahathir.

Earlier when launching the PPN membership campaign at Dewan Jitra, near

here, the Prime Minister said the Japanese "One Village One Product" agriculture concept could be implemented here as it could help in the systematic development of the agricultural sector.

The concept was successful in improving the socio-economic standards of farmers in the Japanese Oita Prefecture, he said.

He said the farmers here should not feel shy to emulate those who had attained success in the agricultural sector.

"Besides being willing to follow what other people have done, we must also be prepared to work hard to achieve what we have planned," he added.

Dr Mahathir reminded the farmers that large membership and capital did not guarantee that farmers' organisations would succeed.

"The important factor is the farmers' willingness to strive and achieve their economic targets.

"Besides hard work, farmers must also have discipline, trustworthiness, diligence, resilience and loyalty," he added.

Dr Mahathir urged all quarters to ensure that the Kedah Government's twinning with the Oita Prefecture would succeed.

He said several other States, including Malacca, were also interested in adopting the concept.

The Prime Minister later presented certificates to area farmers' organisations (PPKs) with the highest membership and shares and also to individual farmers who had some of the highest shares in their respective organisations.

Menteri Besar Tan Sri Haji Osman Aroff, in his speech at the launch of the membership drive, urged the 57,000 farmers living outside the Muda Agricultural Development Authority (Mada) area to join the PPKs as the move would benefit the farming community.

Tan Sri Haji Osman said large membership and capital would allow the PPKs to carry out bigger socio-economic and commercial projects for members.

This would help raise the farmers' income and their standard of living.

"It would also be in line with the Vision 2020," he added.

The Menteri Besar, who said only 42,000 farmers were members of the 20 PPKs in Kedah, hoped more would join.

He said the State Government was committed to help farmers raise their standard of living, and pledged that it would continue to assist the PPN.

"All district officers have been appointed honorary presidents of the PPKs in their districts to ensure these organisations benefit their members.

"This is also one way to bridge the gap between State Government leaders and the farmers," he added.

Earlier, the chairman of the PPN, Encik Badri Haji Yunus, said the organisation would encourage farmers to be more resilient towards challenges and changes.

The PPN would continue to encourage farmers to use modern farming methods and integrated farming management by the year 2000.