

# Grow & lam plants on 'big scale, farmers told

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KUALA TERENGGANU Wed. — The Prime Minister today suggested the setting up of estates for the cultivation of edible plants like pa&an and those eaten as

He said an effort should be made to grow these plants commercially as their supply was dwindling.

"It is time for us to start thinking about planting such plants on a systematic and commercial basis. This will not only help encourage their consumption but also increase farmers' income,"

he said when opening the Sekayu Agriculture Park, about 65km from here.

He said many edible plants, especially the *ulam* varieties, were becoming rare as no one had taken the trouble to cultivate them.

"Many of the traditional food is becoming less tasty and appetising because vital ingredients, especially the *ulam*, are lacking."

Citing an example, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said laksa no longer tasted as good as before due to the absence of certain *ulam*.

*ulam* used in the traditional way of preparing it.

He also said that most of the exotic Malaysian dishes did not smell or taste as delicious as those prepared in the past because artificial flavours and colourings were used now.

"In the old days, pandan leaves were used in food for their fragrance. They were also used as a colouring agent. Nowadays, people do not use them as they cannot be widely found in the market," he said.

He said another factor

which made the use of these plant species less popular now was their inconstant supply as most of them were planted on a small scale.

"We want farmers to divert their attention to planting exotic edible plant species to create a market for the produce," he said.

Dr Mahatahir said that the estates for growing them did not have to be as big as the oil palm or rubber plantations.

However, they must be able to produce sufficient quantities to cater for the

increasing population.

Earlier, Menteri Besar Tan Sri Wan Mokhtar Ahmad said the State Government would eventually turn the Sekayu Agriculture Park into an integrated tourist resort, complete with floating restaurants, chalets and multi-purpose halls.

The 85.5hectare park, which sells fruits from its orchards to visitors, also boasts of waterfalls and water sports facilities. It is also popular among fishing enthusiasts.