

Dr M: Diversify use of coconuts

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LANGKAWI, Sat. — The coconut industry should not be allowed to die or made to become too dependent on young coconuts for its growth, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said many parts of a coconut tree could be put to good use and downstream activities could make it a source of income to farmers.

The Agriculture Ministry should give more emphasis to reviving the industry by encouraging full utilisation of parts of a coconut tree for various purposes.

Dr Mahathir said the "umbut" (soft core of the fronds) of the coconut is popular among the Europeans who consume it as a salad and urged the Agriculture Ministry to look into this.

He also suggested that coconut trees be planted solely for their *umbut* and the sale of *umbut* soaked in salt water.

"It is unfortunate that a

coconut tree will die once the *umbut* is taken.

"But I believe the Ministry could resolve this problem, maybe by planting the tree solely for its *umbut* to enable the tree to be cut down once every two to three years for its *umbut*," he added.

Opening the two-day International Coconut Fair at the CHOGM Park in Kuah here today, Dr Mahathir said the coconut industry was no longer an enterprise for the extraction of oil.

The Prime Minister was happy that the ministry had taken steps to popularise coconuts to help improve the income of farmers.

He said coconut farmers, frustrated with the poor income derived from their plantations, were seeking Government's help, including to get some form of subsidy.

"The Agriculture Minister has popularised young coconuts, which today are

very popular until there is a shortage," he added.

Dr Mahathir said he was confident that the Ministry could overcome the difficulties facing by coconut harvesters when pluck coconuts because of the height of the trees.

In a lighter vein he said: "So you have to make a choice whether you want a short coconut tree to make plucking easier or you want a tall tree so that we become experts in cocount-plucking."

"If we lose in a competition but get a lot of money from short coconut trees, it is a compensation to us," he added.

On the coconut fair, Dr Mahathir said it could help draw visitors to Langkawi because of its uniqueness.

"I am proud that the Ministry organised the fair and hoped it could be held yearly or once every two years," he added.

Dr Mahathir also suggest-

ed that a competition be held to determine the best way young coconuts should be served.

"Young coconuts are usually served with their skin including in hotels and this made them bigger than our heads.

"It is a major problem for the VIPs who have to hold the coconut in one hand and shake hands with the other," he added.

He also suggested that bigger openings be made on the young coconuts to enable the coconut flesh to be scraped with a spoon.

Seven countries including Malaysia took part in the international coconut tree-climbing competition today.

Moosa Ahamed, 33, from the Maldives walked away with a US\$1,500 (RM3,900) prize when he emerged winner in the competition.

Dr Mahathir later launched the Lada ferry service at a brief ceremony at the Kuah jetty.