

Kerpan villagers given a 'good deal', says PM

KLANG, Tues. — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said landowners in Kerpan, Kedah, whose land was being acquired for the integrated tiger prawn farming project should be grateful for being offered a "good deal."

Besides receiving reasonable compensation, the villagers would also be given shares in the company which is undertaking the project, he said.

"If they were to continue to plant padi for another 10 years, they will not receive such lucrative returns.

"For a relong of padi field, the most they will get is between RM200 and RM300 a year," Dr Mahathir said when asked to comment on the arrests of 33 Kerpan farmers after they obstructed the developer of the RM60 million project from bringing heavy machinery into the site yesterday.

The Prime Minister earlier visited the double-tracking project at the railway station here.

He said action had to be taken against them otherwise no development could be carried out.

He said the value of padi field was extremely low — maybe RM1,000 or RM2,000 per relong (about 0.28ha).

He said even in another three years, the land would fetch only about RM3,000 per relong and there was no reason for them to reject the project since they were not only given ample compensation but also a stake in the company.

Furthermore, he said, 90 per cent of the landowners supported the project.

He said the few who opposed it were expecting higher compensation and if everybody acted in that manner, no development could be carried out.

He said it was ridiculous to demand RM50,000 compensation per relong as the value of the land would remain the same if the project was not implemented.

He said those who opposed the project claimed that the value of their land was higher.

"The value of land which obstructed other people's project would certainly go up," he said.

He said such people were holding others to ransom

and if the Government wanted to carry out certain projects, it would have to pay a very high compensation because of this type of people.

He said they might think that it was time to threaten the Government as the general election was coming.

Citing Kampung Baru in Kuala Lumpur as an example, Dr Mahathir said it was located in the heart of the city but the landowners demanded high compensation for its development and as such it was impossible to develop.

Asked whether he was afraid that this would become a trend, he said it already had.

"If the majority agrees (to a project) one or two people will oppose it with the hope of getting more than the others. It is not fair. If all the others agreed we should also concur with the majority's decision. We should not hold other people to ransom," he said.

He believed that the action by the small group of people was the result of instigation by certain people, including the Opposition.

Now, he added, when there was a project being planned there were bound to be people trying to make quick profit.

"Some would erect Umno branch signboards," he said, adding that while he liked the people to support Umno, they should not try to make profit in such a manner.

He said all land acquired by the Government were reasonably compensated. In fact, he said there was a law which requires compensation be paid according to the value of land.

He said the country was enjoying 100 per cent employment, increase in salary, and controlled prices of goods and had attracted some one million foreign workers.

"If the situation in the country was as bad as claimed by the opposition, why did they come here?"

The integrated prawn farming project, covering 200ha, is a joint venture between the State Government, Samak Aquaculture (a subsidiary of the Binladin group based in Saudi Arabia) and landowners.