

PM: Federal Government will only support States if

Reminder on land

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ALOR STAR, Thurs. — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the Federal Government will only support State Governments which use the Land Acquisition Act to carry out development projects if they followed proper procedures.

If the State Governments did not follow proper procedures, the Federal Government would advise and ask them to return the land, he added.

The Prime Minister, citing a recent example involving a State Government, said: "We will support the State Governments if they followed proper procedures. If they do not, we will not support them."

He said in the case of the State Government which he did not name, a plot of land was acquired and sold to a third party at a higher price.

"This is not right. We advised the State Government and asked it to return the land. We do not always support the State Governments. If they are not right, we will advise them not to carry out their action," he said.

Dr Mahathir was speaking to reporters after introducing the MR159 and MR167 padi varieties at the farmers' organisation in Kepala Batas, about 10km from here.

Dr Mahathir was asked if the Federal Government would give "protection" to State Governments should their attempts to acquire land by using the Act were opposed.

Last April, the Federal authorities had asked the Kedah Government to cancel the proposed acquisition of 2,550ha in Tanjung Dawai and Singkir for the multi-million ringgit Jerai International Park project.

To a question on the tiger prawn-rearing project in Kerpan, Dr Mahathir said he had received a telegram from some farmers on the arrest of 33 people who had obstructed the project and also the intention of a group of people who wanted to meet him.

"If they wanted to see me, they should have done so earlier," he said.

Dr Mahathir also said that people should not use force to settle any problems.

"We have the courts and there are ways to resolve any problem. If we use force, then others too will use force against us. This will not benefit anyone," the Prime Minister said, adding that if the group of landowners who opposed the project wanted to write and inform him of their dissatisfaction, they could do so.

Asked for his views on the landowners' appeals for the developer and State Government to wait for court decisions on pending suits on the matter, Dr Mahathir said the implementation of the project involved a certain timeframe.

"The longer we wait, the higher the costs will be."

At this juncture, Menteri Besar Tan Sri Osman Aroff, who was present at the Press conference, said it was not because the landowners were against the project but it was because they were not satisfied with the compensation.

On claims by the landowners that they only had a vague idea on how the project worked, Dr Mahathir said: "They have met the Menteri Besar. They should have asked him during the meeting."

"Everything has been explained to them. Even just now the Menteri Besar gave a lengthy speech about the project," he said.

Earlier, in his speech, Dr Mahathir advised farmers to have a positive attitude towards change and to be receptive to government

procedures are followed

acquisition

projects aimed at improving their livelihood.

He reminded them that every project initiated by the Government was implemented after thorough research to determine its benefits to the people.

In a direct reference to the Kerpan project, Dr Mahathir called on the land-

owners not to obstruct the progress of the project.

"We are human beings and we should let common sense prevail and we should not be governed by emotions," he said.

About 3,000 people, including farmers, attended the ceremony. Also present were Agriculture Minister

Datuk Seri Sanusi Junid and Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali.

Dr Mahathir said landowners obstructed the preliminary work on the project in the hope of obtaining higher compensation.

"Our friends (the other landowners) are in favour of the (Kerpan) project, why

must we (the opposing landowners) prevent it from taking off?" he added.

Dr Mahathir said the people should strive to find ways and means to use their land for maximum gains.

"That's why the Kedah Government initiated the project because gains from padi cultivation is not as

lucrative as rearing prawns.

"Saudi Benladin, the Saudi company undertaking the project, has huge capital and they cannot rear prawns in their country and that's why they want to rear it here.

"We should be grateful

PLEASE TURN TO
PAGE 2, COL 6

Dr Mahathir: Opposition only hardworking during polls

FROM PAGE ONE

that we can breed prawns in our country. Furthermore prawns have good buyers.

"What is wrong with rearing prawns? More so, when the developer offered the farmers shares and high compensation... Each of the farmers will be getting about RM15,000, besides job opportunities and other financial benefits," he added.

The Prime Minister also reminded that there would be political parties which would capitalise on the situation for their vested interest.

"They will display their sympathies. At one stage, they claimed that the urban people were getting more facilities than the rural folk.

"But when we want to bring changes to the rural folk, they instigated the people.

"If we vote for them, we will not benefit in any way. They are only hardworking during elections," he added.

Dr Mahathir said the Government would continue to promote research and development.

He said previously, most research and development efforts were concentrated on the rubber industry

which was the main focus of the colonists.

"We have diversified research and development to padi industry and other areas. We are hoping that some day we will be able to develop a padi clone that can produce 10 tonnes of padi per acre," he added.

The Prime Minister said the Government would sustain its efforts to improve the incomes of the people.

"We have to be responsible to the people who have confidence in us. We are not a Government which does nothing.

"We have no bad intention towards the people; we are striving to find ways and means to improve the people's livelihood," he added.

Dr Mahathir recalled, as an example, the Government's strong commitment in 1960 to help the people improve their incomes.

He said in that year, the farmers protested against the Government's idea of building irrigation canals to encourage double cropping of padi.

"We spent RM400 million on the project, which was resisted by the farmers and today we have tasted the benefits. Too bad that some

of those who were against the project still refused to recognise the success," he added.

Earlier, Osman and Sanusi, in their speeches at the ceremony, felt that farmers should accept the fact that it was no longer financially viable to conduct small-scale farming and that the farmers should think of commercialising their activities.

They also felt that farmers should be prepared to venture into other forms of cultivation which could bring better financial returns instead of relying on only one type of crop.

Osman said: "If farmers do not adapt to this change, they would remain among the poorest groups in the country.

"This is contrary to the lifestyle of their counterparts in other countries who are enjoying a good life because they can adapt to changes quickly."

Sanusi said farmers needed to have an open mind and accept projects that were beneficial for them.

He said this was necessary if they wanted to progress and reap the financial gains.