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LEAD Mahathir-Timber

PM ADVISES OWNERS OF IDLE LAND TO PLANT COMMERCIAL TREES

KUALA TERENGGANU, Aug 20 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today advised owners of idle land to cultivate forest trees with commercial value such as "jati" (teak) and "sentang".

The Prime Minister said the sentang tree in particular grows fast and can yield high-grade timber in 15 years.

"We have been cutting forest trees for their timber for a long time but the time has come for us to replace them by cultivating trees as a future source of timber," he said at a meet-the-people session at the Kampung Pelong Nucleus Orchard, about 50km from here.

Also present were Terengganu Menteri Besar Tan Sri Wan Mokhtar Ahmad, Deputy Minister of Agriculture Datuk Tengku Mahmud Mansor, Deputy Minister of Science, Technology and Environment Datuk Abu Bakar Daud and state executive councillors.

Dr Mahathir, who is on the last day of a three-day visit to Terengganu, said the cultivation of sentang and jati trees did not require a lot of manpower or maintenance, which would allow the growers enough time to venture into other economic activities such as planting fruit trees.

He said it would be a great loss if the fertile soil in the country was not fully utilised.

Wan Mokhtar, in his speech, said the 400-hectare Nucleus Orchard is an integrated project combining the effort of the participants and the advisory services of government agencies.

Under the concept, the participants would cultivate cash crops while waiting for the orchard's fruit trees to mature in five to six years.

Wan Mokhtar said the orchard is planted with fruit trees such as duku, dokong, salak, limau madu and durian and the production is meant for both the domestic and export markets.

Sentang trees are also grown, he added.

According to him, studies showed sentang could produce returns worth RM220,000 in 12 years from each hectare.

Dr Mahathir, who was accompanied by his wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, also visited booths set up to exhibit local agricultural produce.

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