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Trans-Vision

TRANS PERAK POINTS WAY TO NEW RURAL VISION

By: Lat Zaharah Mutalib

TELUK INTAN, June 30 (Bernama) -- Gerakan Desa Wawasan, a rural vision movement promoted by the Rural Development Ministry, will be launched by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on July 4 at Trans Perak, a Felcra padi and oil palm growing scheme acclaimed by the World Bank as a global model.

He will launch the Desa Wawasan logo and the "Perdana Ria" rice brand packed by the scheme's cooperative.

The Prime Minister's wife, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, will also launch the "Project 1001", her brainchild to build more badminton courts in rural areas, at the scheme.

Once an area of thick jungles and swamps, Trans Perak was started in 1981 with a RM220 million World Bank loan as an integrated agricultural project involving 1,236 participants who farmed a total of 12,211 hectares under a share ownership system.

Each farmer was allocated 2.4 hectares but the individual plots were managed jointly as a plantation with the owners meeting the cost of development loans and reaping the fruit of their labour in the form of wages or income from crop harvests.

An area of 4,291.98 hectares was planted with padi and 7,919.79 hectares with oil palm. Another 400 hectares were set aside for an industrial site, which has yet to be developed, while 400 hectares were kept in reserve.

With hardwork, the farmers turned the land into a thriving growth centre which now has schools, suraus, a health centre, a branch of Bank Pertanian, a library and a sports complex.

So successful has been the scheme that it managed to fully repay the World Bank loan by 1993 -- three years ahead of the 15-year repayment schedule.

Inspired by the success, the World Bank made it a condition for other developing countries seeking similar agricultural development loans to visit and study the Malaysian approach.

Last year, the Trans Perak scheme recorded a profit of RM45.52 million, coordinator Abdul Rahim Thamby told Bernama.

He said Felcra also paid RM13.397 million in zakat (tithes) on its accumulated incomes from the scheme to the Perak Baitulmal, the state religious treasury.

A Felcra survey found the participants' income averages between RM700 and RM800 a month. With side incomes, many earn more than RM1,000 a month.

The settlers also own 71 lorries compared to just three when the scheme started, 118 cars (previously 5), 47 tractors, 38 vans, 1,731 motorcycles (190) and 1,419 bicycles (184). Many of the farmers have renovated their homes.

Savings have also grown, with a total of RM2.3 million deposited at the Bank Pertanian branch, RM750,000 invested in the Amanah Saham Bumiputera (ASB) and Amanah Saham Nasional (ASN), and RM252,000 saved in the Pilgrims Management and Fund Board.

Crop yields have risen by using modern farming methods such as tiller-harvesters, a blower for seeding and aerial fertilising with an aircraft.

The padi output has increased to over seven tonnes per hectare per season compared with padi fields in other areas which produce five to six

tonnes per hectare.

Each hectare of oil palm yields 30 tonnes of fresh fruit bunches against 17.4 tonnes previously.

Apart from being stakeholders and working for wages on the land scheme, the farmers also do various types of work created by the area and valued at about RM2 million a year.

According to Abdul Rahim, some settlers have set up businesses to transport padi and oil palm fruit with their own lorries and tractors.

The Felcra Dynamic Women Group (Wadira) is involved in catering and takes orders from companies and organisations in nearby towns. -- BERNAMA

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