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Taib-Rice

BELAWAI, SITE OF SARAWAK'S FIRST MECHANISED RICE ESTATE

SARIKEI, Nov 2 (Bernama) -- Sarawak's first mechanised rice estate will be set up in Belawai, a small coastal town about 40km from here.

Chief Minister Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud said an area of about 7,500ha had been identified for the project which would be fully mechanised, from sowing of the seed to harvesting.

The estate is part of the government's effort to reduce the state's dependency on rice imports, he said before laying the foundation stone for the RM10 million new mosque for the Matu district near here today.

He said the state would need at least between 16,000 to 17,500ha of new rice fields in order to be a major rice producing state in the country in the future.

Abdul Taib said the project was also towards diversifying and strengthening the state's economy.

He also said the government would provide more infrastructural facilities to rural and coastal areas in the state to open up these areas for agricultural activities.

To speed up the development process in the state, the government would continue to invite and welcome outside investors, he said.

He was glad to note that the people, in particular the Native Customary Right (NCR) landowners, were aware of this need and had cooperated with the government in the opening up of their land.

The state has about three million hectares of NCR land and if about 150,000 hectares could be developed, it could give the state an annual income of RM700 million.

He also advised the people against being influenced by insidious politicians with their own agendas out to undermine the government's credibility by spreading all kinds of lies about its leaders .

Meanwhile, commenting on US financier George Soros' call for some control of the foreign exchange markets in an interview with the BBC radio last night, he said it proved Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohammad had been right in advocating the need to ban any form of currency trading which could affect the economy of especially developing nations.

He said Soros had criticised Dr Mahathir for his view and now the truth prevailed. --BERNAMA

ESS ABG