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Bernas' Guinea venture `shows Malaysia's commitment'

Sarban Singh in Monchon, Republic of Guinea  
PADIBERAS Nasional Berhad's (Bernas) US\$10 million investment in the Republic of Guinea in West Africa reflects the commitment of the Government to ensure the success of the South-South cooperation framework.

Agriculture Minister Datuk Amar Dr Sulaiman Daud said Bernas' multi-million ringgit integrated farming project being carried out on a joint venture basis with Guinea showed the Malaysian leadership was a firm believer of "prosper thy neighbour" philosophy.

"Many people from all over are watching us. But our (Bernas) investment here is not solely to gain profit. We want to help Guinea to be self-sufficient, through the transfer of technology and human resource development," he said.

Guinea still imports about 250,000 tonnes of rice annually.

Sulaiman was talking to reporters after witnessing Bernas' first rice harvest in Monchon, about 200km from the republic's capital, Conakry.

The ceremonial harvesting was also attended by Guinean leader President Lansana Conte, several of his Cabinet Ministers, Malaysian ambassador to Guinea Sofian Ahmad, Bernas chairman Ruhanie Ahmad and its managing director Mohammad Ibrahim Nor.

Under the joint venture agreement, Bernas will assist Guinea to grow, mill and trade rice, carry out poultry farming, fruit cultivation and to establish a rice distribution network.

Under phase one of the project, 800 hectares was planted with padi. A rice mill, built on an adjoining 1.6ha area, can mill two metric tonnes of rice per hour.

Fruit cultivation is also under way on a 200ha area in Monchon.

Apart from these activities, a poultry farm has been set up on a 50ha site at Dubreka, 50km from Conakry. The target is to produce 100,000 eggs a day by 1999.

Sulaiman said: "Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has always been a strong believer of South-South cooperation and of the need for smart partnership in today's globalised economy.

"Bernas' investment here is an excellent example of this philosophy and if nurtured well, will prove that it will bring mutual benefit to the people of both countries."

Sulaiman said even President Conte had advised his people to extend cooperation to Bernas when delivering his speech.

Conte advised his people not to stake their claims on land given to Bernas as this could jeopardise the efforts to increase rice production.

"This shows how important this joint venture is to the Guineans. All we want to do is assist them to do integrated farming the proper way."

Sulaiman said judging from Bernas' early success here, he would propose to the Cabinet that it allow Federal Land Development Authority and Federal Land Consolidation and Rehabilitation Authority to invest in Guinea.

"I have seen some small oil palm plantations here. Why not bring Felcra, Felcra or other agencies to invest here as we have the expertise," he said adding that the land was suitable for oil palm cultivation.

He said Bernas would also increase its rice growing activities to another 1,000ha by next year.

"The Guineans are delighted with our presence here as the joint venture has created many jobs. They are willing to give us more land to carry out

our activities because they know that when we make promises, we fulfil them," he said.

Citing another example, Sulaiman said his Guinean counterpart, Jean Paul Sarr has also shown interest in Malaysian participation in the agro-forestry sector.

He said Sarr welcomed the idea to plant fast growing timber species which could be harvested between 12 and 15 years.

Sulaiman also congratulated the Malaysian staff who had made plenty of sacrifices to ensure the project's success.

"On their shoulders lies the Malaysian aspiration to help Guinea boost its rice production and improve in other related areas.

"What I've seen today makes me feel very proud," he said.

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