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Rice-Guinea

MALAYSIA HARVESTS ITS FIRST RICE CROP IN AFRICA

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CONAKRY (Guinea), Dec 28 (Bernama) -- Malaysia's rice cultivation project under its South-South Cooperation with Guinea has proven to be a success with a bumper harvest of the crop last month.

A 800-hectare barren land in Monchon, about 200 kilometres from here which Padiberas Nasional Berhad (Bernas) turned into a lush green vegetation had yielded 3.5 tonnes of the crop.

Malaysia's superior technology and expertise were well proven.

The maiden harvest, far exceeding the expectation of Guinea's traditional planting methods which normally yields an average of 1.3 tonnes per hectare, was well acknowledged as Guinea's President Lansana Conte personally came down to the padi field to launch the harvest.

And for Bernas's team of 30 planters it was a project well rewarded. Their eight months of hardwork in the grimy heat of Africa has paid off.

"For this maiden success in Malaysia-Guinea South-South Cooperation, I offer Malaysia's profound appreciation to our small heroes who had sweated it out in their untiring efforts," Malaysia's Agriculture Minister Datuk Amar Dr Sulaiman Daud said at the harvesting ceremony.

Sulaiman who represented Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at the harvesting ceremony said the Bernas planters had sacrificed much, leaving their families to take up a two-year challenge with Bernas and Sobergui, its local subsidiary managing the project.

They had not only been separated from families but had to endure hard life in a country lacking much in progress, he added.

"There had been times we had to depend on bananas and plain water over a week in the jungles," said a worker who arrived with an advance group to prepare for the padi cultivation.

They also had to clear thick jungles to set up a chicken farm in Dubreka, 50 kilometres from here on their way to Monchon.

Bernas, through Sobergui, a joint-venture set up with the Guinean Government, has also embarked on an integrated project which include fruit growing, rice milling and poultry farming.

The 50-hectare poultry will rear chicken for eggs. With 50,000 birds it is expected to produce daily 100,000 eggs, a scarce vital commodity widely sought here. The poultry project will also be expanded to become a major supporting industry to help improve the people's incomes.

For this project, Bernas had brought out experience poultry farmers from Semenyih and Kajang, Selangor. Three others are carpenters to build structures on for poultry use.

A padi planter from Tanjung Karang, Selangor, Tee Chee Seng, 34, better known as Af Fatt among Malaysians here, told Bernama that he was also responsible for operating the combine harvester brought out from Malaysia.

"It's a bit difficult to teach the local here because of the language problem. But we will try our best until they learnt," he said. --BERNAMA

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