

07 NOV 1997

Guinea-Success

RICE PROJECT IS SHINING PROOF OF SOUTH-SOUTH COOPERATION

By: Mohamad Nasir Yusoff

CONAKRY, Nov 7 (Bernama) -- Padi Beras Nasional Berhad's (Bernas) successful US\$10 million rice farming and milling project in Guinea is shining proof of Malaysia's commitment to South-South cooperation.

Agriculture Minister Datuk Amar Dr Sulaiman Daud said the first harvest averaging 3.5 tonne per hectare from the 800 hectare rice farm in Monchon, 200 km from this capital city, was the proof.

"It may be small in scale but it means a lot in terms of South-South cooperation of which our Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is a strong believer," he told reporters after joining Guinean president Lansana Conte in launching the first harvest today.

Sulaiman said the rice farm and milling project was the crucial first step and with that in place now it could serve as the foundation for Malaysia to extend its assistance further to Guinea in other areas.

He said the success which was achieved in exactly one year from the signing of the cooperation agreement (Nov 7, 1996) between Malaysia and Guinea was made possible by full commitment of both the governments.

Sulaiman said Bernas through its local partner, Societe Bernas De Guinee (Sobergui), had also created about 300 jobs for the locals who had gained from technological transfers from the 30 Malaysian start-up staff.

"To mobilise people and equipment in order to improve the fields, establish and maintain a crop of about 800 hectares, and complete a modern mill in a matter of months is no mean task, even by standards back in Malaysia," he said in congratulating the Malaysians.

He said Bernas would be enhancing its presence in Guinea even further by expanding the crop cultivation to all the 1,800 hectares allocated to it by the Guinean government in the second phase, and with the operation of the two tonne per hour capacity integrated rice mill.

Sulaiman also reminded Bernas and Sobergui to give back to the local people part of the profit they will be reaping from this venture as a social responsibility, for example in building infrastructure projects like schools and clinics.

"This will only serve to further strengthen the South-South cooperation that our Prime Minister so strongly champions," he said.

Sulaiman said the success of Sobergui's projects had persuaded him to recommend to his government that other agencies like FelDA also come here and study the possibility of oil palm ventures in Guinea.

He said the fertile land of this republic might be suitable for oil palm given the advance technology and technical know-how Malaysia had in that field.

Meanwhile, Bernas chairman Ruhanie Ahmad said the rice farm and milling projects had also been of interest to other African countries which had been in contact with him.

Also present at the harvesting ceremony were Malaysian ambassador to Guinea Sofian Ahmad, Bernas managing director Mohd Ibrahim Nor and several Guinean ministers. -- BERNAMA

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