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Malaysia's expertise in the palm oil industry sought

SOUTH American Group of 15 members are seeking Malaysians' expertise to promote the growth and development of the palm oil industry in their respective countries.

Primary Industries Minister Datuk Seri Dr Lim Keng Yaik yesterday said this was conveyed by the Latin American G15 leaders to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad when they met at Davos, Switzerland, recently.

Dr Lim, who is also Gerakan president, said during their discussions with Dr Mahathir, the Latin American leaders expressed a positive view on our efforts over the years promoting palm oil, to reach a recognised and competitive stage in the international market.

"They have also expressed hopes to study and, if possible, implement our formula in creating employment and revenue for smallholders."

Dr Lim said they were also keen to study the plantation industry for employment generation, irrespective whether it was in the form of plantation companies or as rural land reform schemes by the smallholders.

He was speaking to the media after hosting Gerakan's Chinese New Year open house at the party headquarters in Menara PGRM, Cheras. Dr Lim had hosted Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and members of the Cabinet.

"They (the Latin American leaders) said that the industry had been very successful in Malaysia and would emulate it, using oil palm to solve rural poverty problems," Dr Lim said.

"Our formula was developed after Merdeka in the early 1960s and it helped stabilise the country's export-oriented economy based on one commodity - palm oil.

"We also were able to ensure earnings for the rural folk with palm oil cultivation through the various schemes, thus ensuring political stability."

Dr Lim said he had visited Venezuela in 1992 but there was no formal request then from the government.

"Now that the Venezuelan President Dr Rafael Caldera has spoken to our Prime Minister, we will send a team soon to assess the land there and identify suitable tracts for oil palm cultivation," Dr Lim said.

The team will also compile a report on the potential of palm oil cultivation in Venezuela.

As for Colombia, Dr Lim said the necessary preliminary reports had been concluded.

He said that Colombian Foreign Minister Dr Maria Emma Mejia Velez who visited Malaysia two weeks ago had requested Malaysia's assistance in oil palm cultivation.

On other potential palm oil cultivation projects besides Venezuela and Colombia, Dr Lim said there was also potential in northern Brazil, Ecuador, Honduras, Guatemala, Surinam and Guyana.

Asked why there seemed to be a lack of interest in South America, Dr Lim, while agreeing, expressed his disappointment with the large plantation houses.

"Unfortunately, some of the major plantation houses do not focus on their core business.

"We have all the country reports identifying the potential areas and companies in that region but these companies just initiate discussions on

joint ventures but after three years nothing materialises.
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