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Mahathir-Agriculture

PM ENCOURAGES PADI FARMERS TO SWITCH TO VEGETABLE CULTIVATION

YAN, Oct 21 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today urged padi farmers with less than two hectares of land to switch to planting vegetables to increase their income.

The prime minister said farmers with such small plots could not get lucrative returns from padi, unlike vegetables.

"I find that these farmers with small plots are poor...how can they depend on padi for a living with what they have," he said at a meeting with farmers from all over the country, here.

He said they could get better returns of RM3,000 to RM4,000 a month if they switched to vegetable cultivation although the work was harder and the workload heavier.

"We have identified the vegetables that can be planted in the country...in future we'll not be poor any more and at the same time it will help increase the food supply in the country," he said.

He said the vegetables could also be exported because the yield was higher than padi.

"Besides that, livestock breeding can also contribute to raising the income because it brings good profits if carried out seriously," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the government had concentrated on the agricultural sector because it realised that a lot of money was flowing out of the country due to good imports.

The Third National Agricultural Policy was formulated solely to give attention to the agricultural sector, he added.

The government was prepared to provide training and subsidies to farmers who wanted to change to modern agricultural methods, he said, adding that if the response to its efforts was good he believed that there would be no more poverty among the farming community.

"The government has identified five islands in the South China Sea to start large-scale fish breeding projects...it can increase food supply for the country," he said.

He also suggested that the farmers grow a herbal plant called "Kenap" as animal feed to increase their income as these plants could be harvested four times a year and could bring an annual income of RM30,000 to RM40,000 per hectare.

As for padi, he said it should not be cultivated in estates like rubber and oil palm in Felda or Felcra.

He also called on the farmers to help the government and not allow themselves to be instigated by the opposition.

Meanwhile, Agriculture Minister Datuk Amar Dr Sulaiman Daud said farmers should make a paradigm shift from small-time to commercial farming by changing their mindset and improving their entrepreneurship.

Malaysia could emerge as a food exporter if the farmers did this, he said.

"We are also aware that the youth are not interested in venturing into farming. As such, the ministry is negotiating to introduce agricultural studies in schools and tertiary institutions towards producing commercial entrepreneurs in future," he said.

At the function attended by 20,000 farmers, livestock breeders and fishermen nationwide, Mohamed Nazri Mohamed Hassan and Sawilah Masrom were announced winners of the 1998/1999 National Farmers Market Entrepreneur Award in the men's and women's categories respectively for their success in

the livestock sector.

Mohamed Nazri, 33, of Selayang Baru, who owns 600 head of cattle and a RM700,000 abattoir, had an annual turnover of RM3.8 with an overall project cost of RM2 million.

Sawilah, 34, holder of a Diploma in Electrical Engineering from Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM), started off with five head of cattle in 1983 and now has 1,200 head. She is also involved in the oil palm and coconut sectors.

The runner-up in the men's category was vegetable supplier Shaari Yusof while fried chicken seller Wan Ibrahim Wan Mahmud was third.

In the women's category, fresh milk supplier Che Rohaya Abdul Kadir was second and vegetable supplier Che Miah Hussain, third.

Johor won in the marketing category, followed by Selangor in second place and Pahang, third.

They received their trophies and certificates from Dr Mahathir.

-- BERNAMA

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