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Farm sector to remain relevant

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TENOM, Sun. - The agricultural sector will remain relevant despite the Government's focus on information technology, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said the Government's aggressive efforts to develop IT did not mean that the agricultural sector had been forgotten.

Dr Mahathir was speaking at the opening of the Sabah Agriculture Park in Lagud Sebrang, here.

"We may have all the knowledge on IT, but if we do not have food to eat we will have problems," he said, adding that the contribution of the agricultural sector to the country's economic growth was crucial.

Dr Mahathir said agriculture was also being diversified to ensure optimum utilisation of land suitable for agricultural development.

Speaking at a Press conference at the Kota Kinabalu international airport before leaving for Kuala Lumpur, Dr Mahathir said the park was one of the best he had seen in the world.

Unfortunately, he said, Malaysians, particularly the media, had not given much attention to it.

The Prime Minister said the Malaysian Press had never published anything about the park, so much so that he did not know that it existed.

The 200ha park designates 56ha for a recreational lake, a plant museum, and an animal sanctuary, among others, and the remaining 144ha for agricultural exposition, experimental nurseries and forestry projects.

In Kota Kinabalu, Dr Mahathir, in his speech at the foundation laying ceremony for the Federal administrative complex at Likas Bay, said close ties between the Federal and State Governments had brought about co-operation that would ensure continued development in the States.

He said co-operation was difficult to achieve between the Federal Government and an Opposition-led State Government because assistance given to that State was often politicised.

"The Federal Government always tries to be considerate and fair to all States but don't politicise this (assistance)."

He said the decision to build the complex was a symbol of that close co-operation between the Federal and State Governments that gave across-the-board benefits.

Dr Mahathir said that too often when assistance was given to an Opposition-led State, the ruling Government would regard it as its right.

"They say that although they are not from the same (political) party they are not denied their right. When this is politicised, the Federal Government feels a little reluctant to make contributions to the State concerned.

"When the State is led by a BN Government, assistance is not politicised," he said.

Referring to Sabah during its Opposition-led days, he said federal officers who visited the State felt unwelcome and this gave rise to poor relations between the Federal and State Governments as well as their leaders.

Dr Mahathir said the Federal Government therefore could not contribute much towards the development of Sabah.

He said he felt thankful that things had changed.

With the close relations, allocations for Sabah have been increasing and promises made have been fulfilled.

Citing the setting up of Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) as an example, Dr Mahathir said such relations brought about rapid development for the State.