

PM: Sell direct to consumers

Nst - 1 FEB 2002

Ensuring higher returns for small farmers

**By Patvinder Singh
and Ramlan Said**
newsdesk@nstp.com.my

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today called on agricultural producers to endeavour to sell their produce directly to consumers for the benefit of both parties.

He said most farms in the country were small and the farmers who were unable to market their goods had to depend on middlemen.

"They cannot control the prices of their goods. They are pressured by middle men and often lose out. In addition their produce is easily perishable and cannot be sold and as such, whether they like it or not, they are forced to sell their produce at low prices to middlemen," Dr Mahathir said when opening a community market, Pasarakyat, that has been established to provide a way out for farmers who face marketing problems.

The market, situated off Jalan Imbi, is managed by Pasarakyat Sdn Bhd.

It is a company set up by managing director Steve Wong, who was once a farmer plagued by such problems.

It aims to set up an alternative marketing channel for farmers, breeders, fishermen and food processors to reach consumers direct-

ly.

The market complex, situated on a 10,962 sq metre land, also offers free space for food producers to showcase their goods.

Dr Mahathir said he wanted to stress that middlemen were "not always bad people."

"They are forced to sell at high prices because they cannot sell everything that they buy from the farmers.

"So they have to get high prices so that even if part of their goods cannot be sold, they will get some profit," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the Government wanted small farmers to get higher returns and said this was possible if they consolidated their lands to produce higher yields.

"The Government has tried to help the farmers through the pasar tani and the pasar malam but the customers there were from the lower income group and could not buy much.

"So the Pasarakyat concept was where customers with higher incomes can buy from farmers directly," Dr Mahathir said.

He hoped the concept would be successful as it provided opportunity for small farmers to get higher returns.

Dr Mahathir said while middlemen were acceptable, the problem lay in profiteering where the middlemen took too much for themselves.