

Felda merger plan mooted

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PM: Schemes will be better managed

By SA'ODAH ELIAS

KUALA LUMPUR: The Government is mulling over the possibility of consolidating all Felda land schemes so that they can be managed professionally as an estate to overcome the problems of Felda lands being left idle.

A study to determine the feasibility of such plan is being carried out by the Land and Co-operative Development Ministry.

The plan is one of several measures being studied to discourage second-generation Felda settlers from selling their land.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said many of the current generation of Felda settlers were not interested in working their land, especially those who were highly educated.

"Many children of Felda settlers are highly educated. We can't expect them to come back and tap rubber or work on their land. We have to think

of ways to address this problem otherwise, the land would be left idle or would be sold off.

"Soon, most of Felda land schemes will face this problem. Some settlers allowed foreign workers to work on their land and this will create other problems," he told reporters after opening a special gathering of the second generation of Felda settlers at the International Islamic University near here.

The land, he said, could yield better returns if it was managed by a professional team rather than as individual smallholdings and the higher profit could be distributed to the settlers.

Dr Mahathir said details of the plan, including whether the settlers would be made shareholders of the company that would manage their lands, have yet to be finalised.

There are about 120,000 Felda settlers with a combined land holding totalling 447,246ha, of which 324,265ha

was planted with palm oil while the rest with rubber.

Earlier, when addressing the over 4,000 Felda settlers and their children, the Prime Minister advised them against selling their lands for quick profit.

"I understand that having worked so hard, some of you would like to savour the fruits

of your labour by selling your land. The thing is, land is an asset that will remain in your family for generations to come but money will disappear very fast, especially if you don't know how to manage it.

"I also know that there are some settlers who bought unnecessary luxury things including Mercedes Benz

cars after selling their land and this is a shame because if they are not careful, there will not be anything left for the succeeding generation," he added.

Dr Mahathir later launched the Felda Generation Vision Fund for the education, training and welfare of the Felda community.