

24/08/2002

Company may manage Felda land

Firdaus Abdullah

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - The Prime Minister said today the Government may set up a company to take over the 304 Felda settlements in the country, expressing fear that the migration of children of Felda settlers may result in the land being left idle.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the scheme, comprising nationwide oil palm and rubber plantations, might be managed by experienced companies.

"This way, the land could be better managed and revenue accruing from it could be distributed among the settlers or land owners.

"We cannot force the settlers' children, who have high qualifications, to continue tapping rubber or cutting oil palm bunches," Dr Mahathir told a Press conference after officiating the Malaysian Felda Generation Assembly and Symposium at the International Islamic University here.

The Prime Minister noted that already, certain sections of Felda land were being left idle or put up for sale. "Soon all of them (land schemes) would be abandoned.

"We have not found a proper solution yet but the Ministry (Land and Co-operative Development) is studying the matter," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the current dilemma was actually "the problem of success" as the situation was due to the success of Felda families in educating their children.

He said the problem was serious as there was no one to till the land. "If we allow foreigners to come in, and if something happens, it will also be difficult," he said.

The Federal Land Development Authority (Felda) was the brainchild of second Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak. There are 304 oil palm and rubber land schemes, with 120,000 families.

Out of the 600,000 second generation Felda children, more than 50,000 are in various professional fields while 10,000 are pursuing their studies at institutions of higher learning.

In his speech, Dr Mahathir urged the younger generation of Felda citizens to pursue financial management skills so that they could eventually manage their properties effectively.

He said the very fact that Felda land schemes were abandoned proved that the land scheme project has managed to improve the living standard of the settlers.

"The younger generation of Felda citizens should be grateful that their lives are now much better and secure compared to that of their parents.

Dr Mahathir told those present that though the Government was all for industrialisation, it had never neglected the agricultural sector.

"However, only industries could provide jobs and contribute effectively towards our growth.

"So we want the people to be actively involved in the industrialisation of Malaysia, invest and manage the industries in the country," Dr Mahathir said, adding that the Government has great hopes of those from Felda schemes to take up the challenge.

The assembly today, organised by Gabungan Wawasan Generasi Felda (GWGF) was attended by more than 4,000 Felda settlers and their family members.

It was held to discuss their role and direction in the new millennium from the economic, social, educational and training aspects and to come up with proposals covering policy, strategy and assistance to upgrade the

quality of life of the Felda community.

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

He also presented certificates of appreciation to three Felda families which managed to educate their children to become professionals.

Also present at the function were Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, Land and Co-operative Development Minister Tan Sri Kasitah Gaddam, Felda chairman Tan Sri Dr Yusof Noor, GWGF executive chairman Tan Sri Rozali Ismail and IIU president Tan Sri Sanusi Junid.