



Abdullah trying his hand at tapping rubber during his visit to the scheme.

Rubber generating more wealth now, says PM

• By Jaswinder Kaur
jaswin@nst.com.my

PITAS (Sabah): Rubber is now generating more wealth for the people thanks to advancement in research.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said Malaysians were carrying out studies on rubber trees and latex, which in turn translated into a better quality crop.

Citing an example, Abdullah said rubber wood from Malaysia was sought by foreign furniture makers who likened it to oak.

"Furniture makers overseas call rubber wood 'Malaysian oak'. We can increase income from selling rubber wood as people are saving it as good as oak.

"I was also told that latex can be used to produce Vitamin E. I never

expected that it could happen, but because we have people who come up with new research, there is potential for us to commercialise rubber products," he said.

Abdullah said this when he launched a rubber-planting scheme for 2,500 poor families at the Bengkoka peninsula in northern Sabah. The RM100 million project is funded by the Federal Government and implemented by the Sabah Rubber Industry Board.

Rubber trees have been planted in stages at the 10,000ha site since last year. Each family is allocated four hectares and earns between RM300 and RM500 for planting and maintaining its plot.

Each family will get between RM3,000 and RM4,000 a month once the trees mature in five years if the current price of RM4.50 per

kilogramme for unsmoked rubber sheets remains.

The trees can also be harvested in 15 years for rubber wood.

It was music to the ears of smallholders when Abdullah said the demand for natural rubber was strong and would increase.

"Rubber will create wealth for us and help us develop the country," he said.

Abdullah, who arrived by a helicopter from Sandakan and was greeted by more than 1,000 villagers, told the smallholders he would return one day to see how they were progressing.

"I like it when the people are given something that will help them get a sustainable income. It is like the saying that we cannot give fish to a person every day.

"Instead, it's better to give the person a fishing rod. Those who

use the rod to fish, will get more," he said.

"It depends on how much you are willing to do, but this is the way to become independent"

He said although a United Nations report had stated that Malaysia was number one among countries that focused on poverty eradication, the work to achieve this end was far from over.

He said the country wanted to eradicate hardcore poverty in four years.

Based on 2004 statistics, Malaysia's overall poverty rate stands at 5.7 per cent and the level of hardcore poverty is 1.2 per cent. Sabah's poverty rate for the same year is 23 per cent. Sabah is also home to the highest number of hardcore poor families at 19,534. Of this number, 11,4 per cent are in Pitas.