

Felda going big with vegetable, fruit farms

Written by 3K Admin

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Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak yesterday announced Felda's venture into big-scale food production 53 years after its establishment, with RM10 million allocated to kick-start the project.

Launching the Settlers Day 2009 celebrations at the Felda Maokil settlement in Labis near here, Najib said the move was part of the land development authority's plan to boost settlers' income, which mainly depended on palm oil production.

He said settlers could now use underused plots of land to plant vegetables and fruits and rear livestock.

"They could even use the compound of their house for this purpose."

He said the new initiative would transform Felda settlements into gedung makanan (food production centres) and contribute to the government's effort to lessen the country's dependence on food imports. The settlement deemed to be the most active will receive an annual prize of RM1 million.

Under the project, settlers would be roped in as contract farmers and the Federal Agriculture Marketing Authority (Fama) will market their produce.

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There are more than 113,000 Felda settlers in the country, with each owning 4ha.

Expressing confidence in the project, Najib said several settlers who had gone into vegetable and fruit farming had increased their income by up to RM2,000 per month.

On the progress of Felda, he said the scheme had evolved into an international business entity with the recent setting up of Felda Global Venture.

"The Felda flag is now no longer just flying at the remote corners of its settlements but also in Cincinnati, the US; Ottawa in Canada and even Mecca where Felda runs a hotel.

"Felda business activities will be a boon for settlers as they will receive a higher bonus each year as it earns more income."

He said Felda settlers could now look forward to its modernisation, its main goal for the next 50 years.

"We are going to achieve this by opening the minds of the settlers and their children.

"We have spent the past 53 years opening land schemes to lift the settlers above the poverty line. Now, we must change their mindset so that they grab these new opportunities."

He said the modernisation process had started by the upgrading of settlers' houses and neighbourhoods, the opening of residential schools for their children and recruitment of younger settlers in education schemes.

"We even have a programme where youths from settlements are trained to be aircraft maintenance engineers.

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"These are the same youths who could once only imagine themselves being employed as mechanics at bicycle, motorcycle or car workshops."

He called on settlers to remain true to the original ideals of the land-scheme programme and strive to improve themselves and their family.

More than 25,000 Felda settlers from all over the country attended the function. Present were Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman and Home Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein.

Najib had earlier announced that Felda Maokil would receive RM1.7 million for a community hall and a sports arena.

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