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Khao Rakam inmates farm their way to a better life after release

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THE KHAO RAKAM open-air prison in Trat province has a reputation for being one of the most secure in Thailand. More than 10 years, no prisoner has ever broken out.

Prisoners who are sent to this facility are well behaved and have served a quarter of their sentences elsewhere. They are given a chance to reform their lives with farm work that follows the sufficiency economy principles.

The prison is situated on 1,000 rai of land with only a low-level fence surrounding it – but for more

Prisoners who would be selected are first-time convicts. They have to have served a quarter of their jail terms and have to be well behaved to earn classification as first class prisoners.

Those convicted for drug offences should not be on the list of top drug traders, Anek added.

Problem-solving

During their time at Khao Rakam, the prisoners are instructed in new farm theories. One rai each is allotted to them to practice 10

turn prisoners into good citizens by giving them skills for a new life.

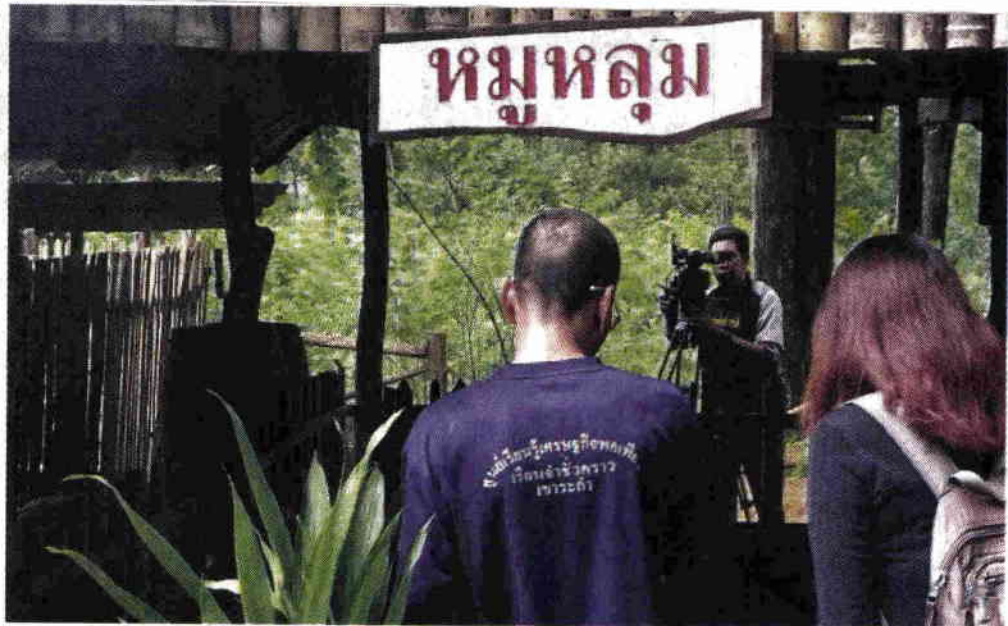
Anek said a number of former prisoners had returned to their communities and several had become leaders.

To be chosen for the project, Anek said prisoners had to prove their worth and show strong determination that they would apply the knowledge learned at the prison to make a living once they were released.

organic vegetables, breeding fish and shrimps to garden designs and earthen house building.

“We teach them a variety of farming styles so that they can have choices in life when they return to society, and they will not falter again and be back in jail,” said Anek.

So far, 159 prisoners are taking part in the programme. Anek said the prison could take up to 300, although not all prisoners meet the



Khao Rakam Prison is providing a new farm theory course to first-class prisoners to enable them to start a new life when they are released.

requirements. One prisoner, identified as Wat, said he had committed murder and was serving a 15-year jail term before it was reduced.

He said he was given a chance to reform his life when he was transferred to Khao Rakam. A one-rai plot of land was allotted to him and about 10 other inmates to practice the farming techniques. He said he had been involved in a variety of projects - from making bio-based pesticides and fertilisers to building an earthen house.

"The instructors teach us the principles and they let us experiment on our own. There is a right and there is a wrong way but what I can say now is that I can do everything and do it my way.

"The heart of the new farm theory is problem-solving, a life skill that has helped cool my head down a lot," said Wat.

The prison is also open to visitors who can learn new farm theory from the inmates-turned-instructors, who once committed crimes but are now being given a chance to live a new life.