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ASB to pay out RM3.3b in dividends and bonus

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Amanah Saham Bumiputera will pay dividends of 10.25 per cent and a bonus of 1.25 per cent for 1997 from February, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said in a statement issued by Permodalan Nasional Bhd.

The dividends for this year remained the same as for 1996 while the bonus was reduced from 3.0 per cent last year.

This year's total payout will be RM3.3 billion, up 8.24 per cent from RM3.05 billion last year. And of the RM3.3 billion, RM2.94 billion has been set aside for dividend payments while RM360 million will be issued as bonus.

Dr Mahathir, who is chairman of Yayasan Pelaburan Bumiputera, said the lower bonus was due to the sharp fall of share prices in the stock market.

The statement was read by PNB chairman Tan Sri Ahmad Sarji Abdul Hamid. Also present was PNB chief executive officer Datuk Mohd Hilmey Taib.

Yayasan Pelaburan Bumiputera is the holding company of PNB, which in turn owns Amanah Saham Nasional Bhd, the body that manages the ASB.

Besides ASB, ASN also manages the Amanah Saham Nasional and Amanah Saham Wawasan 2020. ASN dividends and bonus are expected to be announced next week.

The RM3.3 billion payment is the largest ever dividend and bonus payout declared by ASB as well as its sister scheme, ASN, since their inception in 1990 and 1981 respectively.

However, in terms of combined percentage for dividend and bonus, the highest was recorded in 1994 at 14 per cent aggregate with 4.5 per cent in bonus and a 9.5 per cent dividend.

ASB fund managers were of the opinion that the 11.5 per cent return was reasonable for a long-term and low-risk investment like the ASB scheme, Dr Mahathir stated.

ASB will pay out a total of RM360 million for the bonus compared to RM691 million last year.

Dr Mahathir said there would be 29.5 billion ASB units held by some 4.78 million unitholders at the end of this year - a 17.74 per cent increase from 25.05 million units in 1996.

"I hope investors will continue to retain their dividend and bonus in the ASB scheme and further increase their investments as the scheme is a stable and profitable long-term investment fund.

"PNB is fully committed to protect and manage the investment fund of the ASB unitholders to strengthen the Bumiputera equity participation in the corporate sector," Dr Mahathir said.

Elaborating on the performance of the ASB scheme, Dr Mahathir said 31.8 per cent of its earnings was derived from dividend income, 63.4 per cent from capital gains and the rest from other income sources.

This year's dividend income grew 7.2 per cent from last year, but capital gains went down 7.6 per cent.

At a Press conference in Kuala Lumpur, Ahmad Sarji said the question on whether ASB could maintain the dividend and bonus next year "would be very much depend on the stock market, capital gains and the state of the country's economy".

He said PNB's prudent management and strict guidelines when investing had helped avoid greater losses when the stock market was badly affected.

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