

21/12/1997

Peaceful gathering to ask for better padi price

JITRA, Sat. - About 1,000 farmers gathered for about five hours outside the Muda Agricultural Development Authority complex at Km28 Tunjang, near here, today to ask the Government to consider a hike in padi price.

The farmers had assembled to protest against alleged low padi prices and to voice their displeasure over new conditions introduced by the Agriculture Ministry on the sale of padi.

About 300 policemen, including Federal Reserve Unit, Light Strike Force and Special Branch personnel, were on standby.

However, no untoward incident was reported during the gathering, which lasted from 7am till noon.

Some of the farmers were heard explaining to the police that they had gathered to demand for their rights.

State Deputy Police Chief Senior Assistant Commissioner II Abdul Zahid Syed Ibrahim Al-Habshi arrived at the scene at 9.45am and later met 12 of the farmers inside the Mada complex. Mada general manager Datuk Syed Azizan Al-Idrus also attended the meeting, which ended about 11am.

At 11.30am, one of the farmers, Ahsin Salleh, 35, who attended the meeting came out of the complex and asked the crowd to disperse peacefully.

He also told them that the Agriculture Ministry had agreed to the minimum deduction of padi at 12 per cent instead of the 14 per cent decided earlier.

Asked to comment on the gathering, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad advised the farmers against such actions when seeking Government financial assistance.

He said that this could lead others to also gather and make similar requests.

Dr Mahathir added the Government was looking into problems faced by the farmers. He was speaking to reporters at the Kota Permai Golf and Country Resort in Kota Kemuning, Shah Alam.

The Agriculture Ministry's Padi and Rice Price Control and Monitoring division had directed Padi Beras Nasional, millers and licensed padi purchasers to make deductions between 18kg and 25kg for every 100kg of padi sold to them.

Before the November directive, millers deducted an average of 10kg for every 100kg padi sold. The deductions were for spoilt padi, moisture content, dirt and foreign matter.

However, the Ministry agreed to review the ruling and reduced it to a minimum deduction of 14kg.

After Ahsin finished speaking, Syed Azizan told the farmers to be patient as the Government was sensitive to their plight and that Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim would be in Kedah on Monday to try to resolve the problem.

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