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Sekinchan padi farmers: We want to stay put

Chok Suat Ling; Tanya Lim

SEKINCHAN, Tues. - The 67 farmers in Parit 5, Mukim Pasir Panjang, want to continue toiling the land as "it is the only thing we know how to do".

Besides, it has become sort of a family legacy.

Their families have been planting padi on the same plot for more than 20 years.

All the farmers, participants in the Projek Barat Laut Selangor, a padi farming scheme supported by the Agriculture Ministry, were offered lots at a proposed farmers' market (to be located on their plots) but have rejected it.

Chairman of a committee representing the farmers, Leong San, said: "We do not know how to operate a business. Padi planting is all we know and it is what we want to continue doing.

"They asked us to vacate by February or March. The next crop season is in March and we do not want to miss out on that ... time is running out for us."

The padi on their plot has just been harvested. Two crops are yielded in a year.

The other four farmers who accompanied him - Chong Wan Hong, Fong Kong Sang, Lee Kai Chang and Foo Kok Chow - nodded in agreement.

A letter they received last Thursday from the Sabak Bernam District Office said 0.4 of their 34-hectare land would have to make way for the market and padi planting in the affected area would have to stop.

Leong said if this were allowed to happen, water would be drained away from the entire 34ha and this would jeopardise their crop.

"Our livelihood, and the welfare of our families will be affected. We stand to gain RM485,100 in profit a year from that plot of land.

"The nation will also be deprived of 692,000kg of rice per year, enough to feed 500,000 people a day.

"This area produces one of the highest yields per hectare in Peninsular Malaysia."

Leong said the Sabak Bernam district officer Shamsuddin Alias, in a meeting with them yesterday, asked them to appeal.

"That will take time and we don't have that. What we want is to be able to continue planting padi and we want the title deeds to be given to us.

"Farmers of plots adjoining our 34ha plot have already got their title deeds. Why haven't we got ours?" Leong asked.

The farmers had applied for land titles more than a decade ago and the Selangor Government tried to facilitate their applications.

Former Selangor Menteri Besar Datuk Ahmad Razali Mohamed Ali had even directed the Sabak Bernam District Office to speed up the issuing of land titles to the planters as early as 1984.

It has been 14 years since. The farmers have yet to receive their titles.

Leong said the farmers' market should not be set up at all.

"There is already one nearby and it does not command good business at all. Why should there be another one?"

Leong said the committee had written to, among others, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, his deputy Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim and Selangor Menteri Besar Datuk Abu Hassan Omar, requesting a solution to their problem.

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