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Ban on paraquat: PM's help sought to review board's decision on weed

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - The Malaysian Palm Oil Association (MPOA), National Association of Smallholders (NASH) and Malaysian Estate Owners Association (MEOA) will submit to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad the outcome of a dialogue held today to review the ban on weed killer paraquat.

MEOA president Boon Weng Siew and NASH president Datuk Mazlan Jamaluddin said the meeting today was held to review scientific data based on paraquat usage in the agriculture sector following Primary Industries Minister Datuk Seri Lim Keng Yaik's call for meaningful dialogue between the industry and Pesticides Board to resolve the issue.

They expressed disappointment at the board declining to participate in the dialogue which, they said, would provide an excellent platform to shed light on the reason behind the ban.

"The board said in their reply that it was unnecessary for them to participate in the dialogue today as they had already had a dialogue with us," said Boon, adding that the previous dialogue was between four of their delegates and about 20 board members.

"Even then, they did not give us any factual explanations for the ban, except for suicidal cases," said Boon, who is also MPOA vice chairman.

Mazlan added that the banning of the pesticide on the grounds of curbing suicides was unjustified as paraquat was not the cause for the loss of lives.

"The important thing is that it carries out its function as an agricultural product, and is both effective and safe to use," he said, adding that he had not received any complaints of the product from the association's 700,000 smallholder members.

"Other alternatives they suggested are just not feasible as they can cost up to three times more or harm the roots of the plants," he said.

"Furthermore, to ban a product which the industry is so dependent on would cause an economic repercussion which would include RM2.73 billion in losses over 10 years.

"Almost half of this burden will be borne by the smallholder farmers who can least afford the loss of income," said Mazlan.

"The ban may even cause users to turn to other means of obtaining the product, including using substandard contraband products, which is easily available in neighbouring markets," he added.

Today's dialogue, attended by plantation and estate owners and representatives of related government agencies, focused on the review of the scientific data related to health on paraquat usage and covered various topics.