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'Listing must benefit settlers'

PUTRAJAYA, Wed. - Felda's listing on the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange will only be made once the Government is satisfied the interests and welfare of its 103,000 settlers are safeguarded.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said the settlers should not be made to feel that the listing would in any way compromise this.

"The Cabinet has made a decision on this... but we still need to wait and do a more detailed study. What is important is that we do not want the settlers to assume that we have not given any consideration to their interests and welfare," he said at the Prime Minister's Department today.

He said this was important as irresponsible quarters might mislead the settlers into believing that the listing was not beneficial to them.

Abdullah, who is also Finance Minister, was asked on Felda's listing after the Cabinet meeting.

The plan to list Felda on the KLSE was announced in September by Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, then Prime Minister and Finance Minister, while presenting the 2004 Budget.

Felda's listing would enable it to generate funds from the capital market and it would not have to depend on the Government for its financial support.

Felda chairman Tan Sri Dr Yusuf Noor has said there were parties out to sabotage the listing exercise by alleging that the Government intended to take back the settlers' land.

Yesterday, MailMoney quoted Second Finance Minister Datuk Dr Jamaludin Jarjis as saying that the listing might be done this year and that it had not been shelved.

On Saturday, Land and Co-operative Development Ministry Parliamentary Secretary Dr Robia Kosai also assured the settlers at 300 Felda land schemes nationwide that their rights would not be affected by the listing. She had said settlers would get share allocations and other benefits which would help improve their socio-economic status.

Felda may be valued at between RM11.7 billion and RM33.7 billion after it is reorganised into a public company and traded on the KLSE.

The Felda community is expected to control 33 per cent equity, worth about RM3.3 billion, in Felda Holdings Berhad when it is listed.

It was proposed that 10 per cent equity be given to the 103,000 settlers alone, instead of the original 10 per cent for the entire Felda community which comprised settlers and staff.

It was also proposed that five per cent of the RM10 billion listing be allocated to the Felda staff.

Besides that, the Felda settlers and staff who hold 51 per cent and 49 per cent equity respectively in Koperasi Peneroka Felda would indirectly benefit from the 18 per cent equity allocated to the co-operative.

This would bring their total shareholding to 33 per cent.

The estates involved in the listing are those owned by Felda covering 354,000ha. The 837,000ha owned by the settlers will not be touched.