

## **'Gov't interfered in lawsuits against Felda'**

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**By Nigel Aw**

PKR secretary-general Saifuddin Nasution has levelled the claim that the government has attempted to influence judges presiding over Felda cases.

This, he said, is backed the minutes of a Felda meeting chaired by Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak which took place at Parliament House on June 27 last year.

NONEAccording to a copy of the minutes showed to journalists, the contentious line reads:

"For cases involving oil extraction rate (OER), where (the) trial dates have not been fixed, ensure that judges and lawyers are given understanding of the subject and the technical method of OER calculation.

"Ensure that Felda wins this case so that future cases will not be affected."

Saifuddin said the cases refer to a lawsuit filed by 766 settlers from Serting Hilir and the Raja Alias Felda settlement against Felda, in the Seremban High Court; and another suit by 645 settlers from the Maokil Felda settlement, filed in the Johor Bahru High Court.

"The reference to judges is clearly shows a case of judicial manipulation," he told a press conference at the Parliament lobby today.

Prime minister must explain

Saifuddin said this revelation raises concerns about some 20 other Felda cases that are in court, including the high profile case of attempting to block the public listing of Future Global Ventures Holdings Bhd (FGVH).

"I ask for the prime minister to explain in the next question and answer session, what does he mean by 'understanding must be given to judges'," he said.

NONEAlso present was Subang MP R Sivarasa (left) who is representing settlers from Serting Hilir and Raja Alias settlements in their lawsuit.

"Briefing the lawyers is not a problem, but it is up to judges to listen to the arguments from lawyers, not to take orders from the prime minister," said Sivarasa.

He adds that this has raised doubts among his client including a third OER case recently filed on behalf of some 1,000 settlers from the Jengka settlement at the Temerloh High Court.

A fourth case, he said, will also be filed soon on behalf of settlers from Chini which is located within the premier constituency, at the Kuantan High Court.

In recent years, Felda and Felda Palm Industries Sdn Bhd has faced a series of lawsuits for allegedly cheating settlers of their palm oil produce.

Sivarasa explained that settlers are paid according to the percentage of extraction from their produce which the companies placed at between 17 and 20 percent.

"But when we conducted an independent study, we found that they were actually at 25 percent to 27 percent," he said.

Sivarasa said that every percent is worth approximate RM35 to RM40 per tonne and a planter would normally be able to produce between eight and 10 tonnes of oil palm fruits a month.

“So imagine how much they have lost over the period of years,” he said.

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