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NEWS

'GST yields will benefit rural folk'

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BRIDGING THE GAP:
Revenue will be channelled to ensure fair development, says Najib

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THE implementation of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) will benefit people in rural areas as the government plans to channel most of the additional revenue to help them, said Datuk Seri Najib Razak.

The prime minister said he had informed the cabinet of the plan, in which priority would be given to helping rural folk and developing rural areas.

"We will announce the types of assistance when our revenue increases (with the implementation of GST).

"They will ensure balanced, fair and inclusive development in both urban and rural areas," Najib said during the presentation of Rubber Industry Smallholders Authority (Risda) dividends here yesterday.

Present were Rural and Regional Development Minister Datuk Seri Mohd Shafie Apdal and Pahang

Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Adnan Yaakob.

Najib said the government did not want Malaysia to end up like countries that had a big gap between urban and rural development.

He said the opposition would never highlight the government's plan to help rural folk, as its main aim was to mislead the public about GST.

"They have been telling the people that GST will result in the price hike of all items and that is irresponsible.

"The fact is that not all items will experience a price increase," said Najib, who also hit out at the opposition for claiming that GST would burden the people.

He reiterated that GST was not a new tax, as it was introduced to replace the present Sales and Services Tax.

On the drop in rubber prices, Najib said medium- and long-term measures would be introduced to help affected smallholders and rubber tappers.

He said the Rural and Regional Development, and Plantation Industries and Commodities Ministries had been tasked with coming up with solutions to cushion the impact from the decline in commodity prices in the global market.

"Among others, we will ensure that smallholders can get good prices when selling latex or clumped rubber.

"We will help increase their productivity by encouraging them to replant better rubber clones and venture into other activities that can increase their income."

Najib said the government had allocated RM154 million to be distributed as a RM500 one-off payment to each of the 260,000 smallholders and 48,872 rubber tappers who had been affected by low rubber prices.

At the event, he handed over RM164.98 million in dividends to smallholders, who joined Risda's new plantation and commercial replanting schemes last year and this year.

A total of 16,080 smallholders was involved in the Clustered New Plantation Scheme, while 41,675 participated in the Commercial Replanting Scheme.

Najib announced that the allowance for more than 500 Risda community developers would be increased from RM500 to RM800 monthly.

Najib and his wife, Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor, later joined constituents in preparing *bubur lambuk* at his official residence here.

Meanwhile, Bernama reports that Najib presented land ownership grants of 4.05ha each to 172 Felda Chini Timur 3 pioneers.

He presented the grants before breaking fast with the pioneers at the Felda Chini Timur 3 community hall here.

The pioneers received the grants after having settled their repay-



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak and his wife, Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor, with Pahang Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Adnan Yaakob and his wife, Datin Seri Junaini Kassim, stirring 'bubur lambuk' in Pekan yesterday. Pic by Mustaffa Kamal

ment, involving development costs, to Felda and the state government.

Najib said the grant presentation was the result of the pioneers' sacrifices, when Felda started to open up 30 years ago.

"Due to their patience... since 1985, these pioneers can now reap profits and own land as much as 10ha."

Present were Adnan and Felda chairman Tan Sri Isa Samad.

Najib also announced the construction of a new mosque in Felda Chini Timur 3, involving an allocation of RM4.5 million.

Later, he urged Muslims in the country to stay away from militant activities and extremism.

He said Islam encouraged Muslims to adopt a moderate approach and portray a positive image of the religion to people of different backgrounds.

"Militancy and extremism, including mass killing in the name of religion, is against true Islamic teachings.

"Even in war, Islam does not permit the killing of civilians," he

said after performing *Isyak* and *Tarawih* prayers at the Al-Muhajirin mosque in Batu 8 Lepar, near here, last night.

Najib, who is also Pekan member of parliament, said many Muslim countries respected Malaysia, which practised moderation.

"Our moderate approach makes it easy for us to deal with others, including when we want to perform the haj."

Najib said Tabung Haji chairman Datuk Seri Abdul Azeez Abdul Rahim, who was present, had just returned from Saudi Arabia to discuss haj matters. Also present was Adnan.

Najib later presented Ramadan aid to senior citizens and the needy in the village.

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