

# PM: MERGE PADI LAND FOR BETTER YIELD

Consolidating land will enable farmers to reap big profits, grow other crops too

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**P**ADI farmers need to consolidate their padi smallholdings and operate them professionally as estates, said Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Dr Mahathir said if this was not done, the farmers would continue to be among the poorest in the country, continuing to depend on subsidies to manage their land.

He said a two to three ha plot of rice fields could not benefit farmers much, similar to oil palm or rubber plantations managed on a small scale.

"Therefore, we have to turn padi fields into bigger farms covering 1,000 to 2,000ha, and managed by experts and skilled individuals, much like in oil palm and rubber plantation companies.

"The padi farm can then use the best crop planting methods, modern tools and machinery, and fertilisers to boost padi yield, so that farmers would be able to reap big profits.

"The farm can also be cultivated with other crops such as vegetables, durian, pineapple or poultry, so that they can get an all-year return, compared with just six months at present."

Dr Mahathir said this after launching the National Padi Convention 2019 here yesterday.

Present were Kedah Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Mukhriz Mahathir and Agriculture and Agro-based Industry Minister Datuk Salahuddin Ayub.



Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad launching the National Padi Convention 2019 in Alor Star yesterday. With him are Kedah Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Mukhriz Mahathir (third from left) and Agriculture and Agro-based Industry Minister Datuk Salahuddin Ayub (right), PIC BY SHARUL HAFIZ ZAM

Dr Mahathir said the proposed changes might be radical and difficult to implement in the traditional context, but they needed to be done to ensure a better future for the farmers.

"If this method of padi farming is accepted, I am convinced that farmers will no longer be poor.

"The country imports about RM60 billion worth of vegetables a year. With modern techniques, we do not need vast tracts of land to produce a bigger yield and can

replace the imported vegetables.

"Farmers can work on the padi fields and earn income without losing their rights and profit, according to the size of the combined land."

On the pension scheme for civil servants, he said the government had not discussed and decided on a new scheme to replace it.

He said the pension scheme had become a huge financial burden to the government.

"Payment of pensions are a

problem because some senior officers are currently earning a big salary of up to RM20,000 a month, and they will receive half of their last pay upon retirement.

"Previously, the monthly salaries of senior officers never exceeded RM6,000 or RM7,000, and they would receive about RM3,000 in pension a month.

"But we are also aware that living costs have increased, so we need to study the pension scheme from time to time."

Recently, Public Service Department director-general Datuk Seri Borhan Dolah said a new pension scheme was expected to be implemented next year, involving new appointments in the public sector.

The mechanism, which will reduce the government's financial burden by up to RM5 billion a year, is being fine-tuned and subject to the government's final decision. **Additional reporting by Noorazura Abdul Rahman**