

PROFITS FROM 890 PROJECTS

RM189.08m FOR RISDA, FELCRA SMALLHOLDERS

PM hopes dividend payout will ease planters' burden and help in Hari Raya preparations

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PRIME Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin has announced a RM189.08 million dividend to smallholders of the Rubber Industry Smallholders Development Authority (Risda) and Federal Land Consolidation and Rehabilitation Authority (Felcra).

"Up to 58,826 Felcra Bhd participants nationwide will receive 2020's final total income distribution worth RM107.05 million in stages starting today (yesterday)," he said.

"The payout is the result of the net profit of 890 plantation projects owned by participants that

are developed by Felcra.

"The remaining 327 projects are those that have yet to have any yield and are in the phase of replanting."

He also said from the dividend, RM82.03 million would be paid to 16,080 smallholders in the rubber and oil palm sector under the Cluster Replanting Scheme (RTBB), as well as 15,165 smallholders in the Commercial Replanting (TSK) scheme.

Muhyiddin said Risda would also distribute RM2.48 million as its corporate tithe to 4,000 underprivileged smallholders and selected religious institutions.

"I would like to congratulate the Rural Development Ministry, Risda and Felcra on their success in presenting this assistance, which is meaningful to the rural community.

"It is my hope this dividend will more or less ease the economic burden of Risda and Felcra smallholders in facing the Covid-19 pandemic and to prepare for Hari Raya Aidilfitri celebrations," he said after a ceremony to hand over the Risda and Felcra dividends at Auditorium Sultan Ah-



Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin looking at a flower artwork after announcing dividends for Risda and Felcra smallholders at the Risda headquarters in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. PIC BY FATHIL ASRI

mad Shah at Risda headquarters here yesterday.

Present were Rural Development Minister Datuk Dr Abdul Latiff Ahmad and Risda chairman Datuk Mohd Salim Mohd Sharif.

On a related matter, Muhyiddin said RM69.9 million under the Monsoon Season Aid (BMT) had been allocated this year to benefit rubber smallholders under Risda. A total of 232,319 rubber smallholders would receive RM600 each under the assistance.

"They will be paid RM300 in December this year and the rest will be paid in January next year (2022).

"This continued effort by the government is to protect the welfare of smallholders, who are the backbone of the nation's rubber industry."

He said the ministry viewed seriously the welfare of smallholders in facing difficulties and disasters. He said last year, the government launched the BMT for smallholders and rubber tappers worth RM129.8 million, besides

the RM64 million Covid-19 Special Assistance.

Muhyiddin said the government had never neglected the plight of Risda smallholders and Felcra participants as proven in the 2020 and 2021 Budget.

"You are the pulse of the rubber and oil palm industry. You play a primary role in the development of farms so that the best revenue can be achieved from production to meet the industries' needs."

To assist rubber smallholders in boosting their income, Muhyiddin said the government, through the ministry and Risda, would widen the scope of the Rubber Replanting Assistance programme this year.

He said smallholders could apply for this assistance for uncultivated land, or land which was being cultivated with commodities other than rubber.

"To qualify for the assistance, the land size must be a minimum of 0.1ha to a maximum of 5ha. This effort will uplift the economy of smallholders.

"The government aims to in-

crease national rubber production by having plantations in this sector occupy up to 1.1 million hectares and to reduce uncultivated land."

Muhyiddin also noted that despite the encouraging commodity price of palm oil in the market, Felcra was affected by the pandemic due to a lack of skilled manpower required to harvest and collect the yield.

To overcome the problem, Muhyiddin said Felcra Bhd had since September last year committed to creating 2,500 harvesting operator jobs nationwide.

"To date, up to 200 people have undergone the skills training required for them to conduct their duties efficiently and effectively.

"This has opened up the chance to those who lost their income because of the pandemic, and among those chosen for the training are prisoners under parole.

"This is an effort to assist them to start a new life and to achieve success so that they will not be shackled by their past," said Muhyiddin.