

Aid to weather the monsoon

PM: Nearly RM70mil set aside for rubber smallholders

KUALA LUMPUR: A total of RM69.9mil Monsoon Season Aid has been set aside to ensure the well-being of rubber tappers and smallholders in the country, says Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin.

"Concerned with the plight of rubber smallholders who have been the backbone of the country's rubber industry, the government has once again allocated a Monsoon Season Aid (BMT) for 2021 that will benefit 232,319 smallholders," he said when announcing the Risda and Felcra Bhd dividend payout at Risda headquarters here yesterday.

He said smallholders will be provided with RM300 in December this year and another RM300 in January 2022.

He noted that the government previously set aside RM129.8mil to help smallholders and rubber tappers during the rainy season last year.

This, he added, does not include the RM64mil provided for them under the Covid-19 special aid programme.

To help rubber smallholders increase their income, Muhyiddin announced that Risda would be expanding its rubber replanting programme.

Under the programme, smallholders will qualify for aid if they utilise between 0.1ha and 5ha of



Payout: Muhyiddin launching the Felcra Bhd and Risda dividend declaration ceremony at Risda headquarters. With him is Risda chairman Datuk Mohd Salim Mohd Sharif. - AZHAR MAHFOF/The Star

idle land or land without rubber trees for replanting purposes.

"This will not only improve the economy of smallholders but also help the nation's rubber output by ensuring that rubber plantations reach a total size of 1.1 million hectares and also help to reduce idle and uncultivated land," he added.

As for Felcra, Muhyiddin said that despite encouraging palm oil commodity prices, the industry was

affected by a lack of manpower to harvest and collect the oil palm yield due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

To address this, he said that Felcra had initiated a programme in September last year to create 2,500 job opportunities for harvest operators nationwide.

So far, he said some 200 applicants had since undergone training with the opportunity given to those who lost their income due to

the pandemic.

"This is also an effort to help the persons on parole to start anew, achieve success and move on from their past mistakes," he added.

Muhyiddin also announced that Felcra had declared dividends totalling RM107.05mil for 58,826 participants while Risda will be distributing dividends totalling RM82.03mil to 31,245 smallholders.

"It is my hope that the dividends would help ease the economic burden of Risda smallholders and Felcra participants in facing the challenges of the pandemic while also helping in their preparations for the coming Hari Raya Aidilfitri celebrations," he added.

Under Felcra, a total of 16,080 participants will be paid dividends totalling RM38.17mil under its cluster new planting plan involving 19,306ha, while 15,165 participants under its commercial replanting programme involving 20,123ha will be paid a total of RM43.86mil in dividends.

Meanwhile, Muhyiddin also announced that Risda would be distributing RM2.48mil as zakat contributions to more than 4,000 poor smallholders and selected religious institutions.