

'Five crops every two years doable'

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ALOR SETAR: The right kind of engineering, infrastructure enhancements and coordination will easily allow padi farmers to push beyond planting two crops a year to five every two years.

Padi fertiliser and agricultural solutions provider Sunny Nah said Kedah's Muda Irrigation Scheme was ready to almost double Malaysia's rice output because "it is all about water".

"We have the water; all it takes is for the farmers and agricultural authorities to get their act together with proper funding and efficient planning to get five crops every two years, which is very much possible," he said.

Those in the industry are aware that weaknesses in the Muda Irrigation Scheme were being ironed out years ago and with enough Federal Government support, rice yield in Kedah could even double.

"The planting of rice is nothing new and many countries have spent decades on research and development to enhance yields.

"With enough funding support, all the players, from the farmers to the tech experts, can bring Kedah's rice production to great

heights. For example, the soil in the padi fields can be rehabilitated as it contains a lot of impurities brought about by the old system of heavy chemical fertiliser usage.

"Many things can be done to rejuvenate Kedah padi fields and we look forward to the focus by the Federal Government," Nah said.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim yesterday announced plans to pump RM3bil into Kedah's rice production to boost yields from growing two crops a year to five every two years.

Modern technology, irrigation and soil care can rejuvenate padi growth and even allow for integrated agriculture such as fish production to develop alongside padi farming, Nah added.

He characterised the effort as "spending money to save money", stressing that Malaysia's high food import bill, even for rice, must be addressed urgently.

The farming community in Kedah has given positive feedback to the PM's call to them to work with government agencies and departments, Bernama reports.



On the ground: Anwar meeting farmers at the Sentuhan Madani event in Alor Setar, Kedah. - ZHAFARAN NASIB/ The Star

Kartini Mat Rashid, 38, a Mada padi farmer, said such cooperation is vital as the padi industry is now facing various challenges in meeting the nation's food needs.

"The government departments and agencies have better skills and knowledge, so it is not wrong to work closely with them. The end result is to increase our production and incomes, and improve the state's and country's economy as well," she said.

Ahmad Abu Bakar, 70, from Alor Setar, agreed, saying that padi farmers should cooperate with the relevant agencies, such as Mada, to help increase their yields and income.

"We need to work with these

departments and agencies to increase our padi harvest. For example, if we need advice regarding seeds, fertilisers and padi diseases, we can ask the experts directly.

"When there is communication and cooperation between the parties, we can solve all the problems that arise and benefit from the results, especially in terms of yield and income," he said.

Mohd Ridzuan Azhar, 38, from Alor Setar, who helps cultivate his father's padi fields, said all parties need to play their respective roles to realise the PM's wish to see Kedah progress out of poverty.

Earlier, during the Kedah-level Sentuhan Madani programme

with farmers, livestock breeders, fishermen and rubber smallholders at the Mada headquarters here yesterday, Anwar urged padi farmers to cooperate in making the five planting seasons in two years pilot project successful to improve their living standards.

Also present at the event were Deputy Prime Minister cum Rural and Regional Development Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, Agriculture and Food Security Minister Datuk Seri Mohamad Sabu, Home Minister Datuk Seri Saifuddin Nasution Ismail, Communications and Digital Minister Fahmi Fadzil and Chief Secretary to the Government Tan Sri Mohd Zuki Ali.