

RM314m dividend for planters

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By M. HAMZAH JAMALUDIN AND T.N. ALAGESH

COMMODITY WINDFALL: High palm oil and rubber prices benefit Risda smallholders, says Najib

PEKAN: PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak yesterday handed RM314.6 million in dividends to 39,306 smallholders, who joined the Rubber Industries Smallholders Authority's (Risda) new plantation and commercial replanting schemes last year and this year.

With rubber and palm oil fetching high prices last year, the smallholders will receive RM1,350 for every 0.4ha. Since each participant owns an average of 1.2ha, this averages to RM4,000 per planter.

Najib said the stable prices of the two commodities enabled smallholders, who owned a 2ha rubber plantation, to earn RM2,105 a month, while those who planted oil palm enjoyed RM1,780 a month.

Last year, Najib gave out RM179.6 million in dividends to 42,206 participants in the Risda replanting scheme.

"We have fulfilled all our promises to smallholders, including increasing the replanting aid to RM9,230 per hectare in the peninsula, RM13,500 per hectare in Sabah and RM14,000 per hectare in Sarawak," he said when he launched Risda's national-level "Kasihi Pekebun" (love the smallholders) programme here.

Present were Risda chairman Tan Sri Rahim Tamby Chik, Deputy Rural and Regional Development Minister Datuk Hasan Malek and Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Adnan Yaakob.

Najib said his call for Risda to launch an intensive fertilisation scheme last year also helped increase rubber production from 939,241 tonnes in 2010 to 966,210 tonnes last year.

The government has also allocated RM397 million under the 2012 Budget to help smallholders, including those who wanted to join the replanting scheme.

Najib said since Risda's establishment, more than 1.6 million ha of smallholdings were replanted with rubber, oil palm and other commercial crops, which involved 947,106 smallholders.

He said the government had always given priority to smallholders' issues as there were 279,127 rubber and 147,254 oil palm smallholders in the country.

At the function, Najib announced an increase in the allowance of Risda community developers from RM300 to RM500 a month, which started on Jan 1.

(These are smallholders who act as middlemen between Risda and other smallholders.)

Najib later presented 20 computers and goodie bags to Rumah Penyayang Tun Abdul Razak, which houses 65 orphans.

He broke fast with the people at the Kampung Temai mosque before performing terawih prayers at Kampung Mambang in Chini.

When breaking fast with the villagers, Najib said the country's economic growth would not be jeopardised, although the government had introduced financial aid for the people.

He said the government implemented a proper development plan, which had helped the country to enjoy steady economic growth.

"As a responsible government, we have introduced various financial initiatives so that the people's welfare will always be safeguarded.

"In order to sustain the government's expenditure, we have adopted certain plans to ensure it can continuously generate income for the country." Additional reporting by Fahirul N. Ramli

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