

Pak Lah: Firms can boost agriculture

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KUALA LUMPUR: Government-linked companies (GLCs) and large firms should take part in agricultural activities to help develop the industry, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said.

The Prime Minister said they could help develop the agriculture and agro-based industries by getting involved in activities that had big export potential.

He said he hoped those companies would participate in the industry, including traditional ones such as fisheries, livestock and fruit cultivation, and not only in the plantation industry such as rubber and wood.

"They can become a catalyst for growth in the agriculture sector. They can form smart partnerships with smallholders by developing satellite farms through contract farming," he

said when opening the Conference on the Direction of the Agriculture Sector and Agro-Based Industry here yesterday.

He added that efforts to enhance the agriculture industry would be successful if it was done in a large scale.

Abdullah noted that he had proposed to Khazanah Nasional Bhd and Permodalan Nasional Bhd to venture into agricultural projects.

"I am only proposing and am not ordering anyone. It is up to them to decide based on the viability of the venture.

"But the message is that we want to see companies or the big boys coming in," he added.

Abdullah said the Agriculture and Agro-based Industries Ministry and Bank Negara should look into how banks could provide appropriate cred-

it facilities for entrepreneurs in the sector.

Without credit facilities, he said, it would be difficult to encourage the private sector and small entrepreneurs.

He added that the Government was prepared to review the present incentive packages to reduce the investment risks on those entrepreneurs.

He also called on the relevant ministries and state governments to speed up the process of obtaining land for agriculture and agro-based projects.

To a question, Abdullah said the Government had "put on hold" plans to list Felda Holdings Sdn Bhd on the Malaysian Stock Exchange Bhd.

"We are looking at so many things now because the new approach may require us to think of something else," he added.