

## KERATAN AKHBAR

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### FELDA settlers to bear RM18,000 in debt for replanting of oil palm



KUALA LUMPUR (July 27): Federal Land Development Authority (FELDA) settlers will have to bear the cost of RM18,000 per hectare for the replanting of oil palm, which is one of the factors that the group is burdened with debt.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Economy) Datuk Seri Mustapa Mohamed said this amount had increased by almost 30%, compared with RM14,000 previously.

"A settler makes a loan repayment of between RM250 and RM300 to FELDA. If they are with FELDA, for oil palm planting, they only pay RM250, but if they are not with FELDA, they have to pay RM300 a month.

"The cost incurred for replanting now is RM18,000 for one hectare of oil palm, compared with RM14,000 before. For rubber plants, it is RM13,710," he said in Parliament on Wednesday (July 27).

He was answering a supplementary question from Datuk Dr Hasan Bahrom (Pakatan Harapan-Tampin), who wanted to know how much debt settlers would incur if they participate in replanting with FELDA, and what actions and recommendations will FELDA make for settlers who cultivate their own crops to solve their problems when sometimes their crops are abandoned.

Mustapa noted that loan assistance to settlers is currently no longer given automatically, and instead they would have to submit an application.

"If in the past, this debt or loan assistance was given almost automatically, and the debt was for six years, eight years. Now it is only four years. This is a step taken to reduce the debt burden of the settlers," he said.

Meanwhile, Mustapha said FELDA settlers who conduct replanting individually amount to 17,304 settlers — 15.4% of the 112,638 FELDA settlers in total — while the number of settlers who replant with FELDA is 84.6%.

Out of 17,304, the number of settlers who replanted individually amounted to 8,501 settlers or 49.1%, who sent their harvests through FELDA pay sheets, while 50.9% of the settlers sent their results to outsiders.

Mustapa was replying on behalf of the prime minister, who was responding to a question by Hasan, who asked to state the number of FELDA settlers who are replanting individually, what are the factors that motivate them to do so, and are there any assistance schemes that the Government can provide to stimulate such activities.

Mustapa added that among the factors that encourage settlers to manage replanting individually is that they do not want to share income in blocks or in stages.

"Apart from that, there is the issue of inheritance and no agreement between the heirs to manage the plantation, wanting to be independent and able to manage the plantation, the issue of a labour shortage in the plantation, as well as the factor of settlers' children returning to FELDA to manage the plantation," he said.

To date, the government has written off a debt of RM8.4 billion for FELDA settlers.