

General

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Govt Allocates RM35 Mil For Kenaf Development Under 9MP

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 14 (Bernama) -- The government has allocated RM35 million for Kenaf plant development under the Ninth Malaysia Plan, Plantation Industries and Commodities Minister Datuk Peter Chin Fah Kui said Thursday.

The ministry's initial allocation through the National Tobacco Board was RM10 million but was raised to RM35 million under the Mid-Term Review, he told Bernama.

He said the money would be used to provide institutional support to develop Kenaf including land development (infrastructure), good agricultural practices, mechanisation, harvest and post-harvest systems, storage, training, marketing, seed production, credit and processing centres.

"We are actively looking at the mechanisation harvest," he said.

Peter Chin said the National Tobacco Board was allocated RM25 million under the ninth plan to help tobacco farmers integrate with other crops with tobacco with the eventual goal to replace tobacco if it was no longer grown.

"Some of these funds are used to assist tobacco farmers grow Kenaf in the form of soft loans and assistance to purchase agricultural inputs. Tobacco farmers are also well endowed with agricultural equipment like irrigation systems and mini tillers which could also be used in Kenaf farming," he said.

He said Malaysian Agricultural Research and Development Institute (Mardi) has been allotted RM5 million for upstream research while Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) has been given RM5 million for downstream research.

"Both are working closely with the National Tobacco Board to ensure their research meets the industry needs. Universities have also sourced funding for specific Kenaf research, for example, UPM has been allocated RM700,000 to assist the board to develop a mechanised harvester and good agricultural practice package for the Beach Ridges Interspersed with Swales (BRIS) soil," he said.

Due to the importance of an efficient harvest and post-harvest mechanised system, the minister said the board had allocated Mardi additional RM500,000 to develop a combine harvester and in-field decorticator.

His ministry, he said, had also allocated RM1.6 million to Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) to work with the private sector to study technical and economic viability of Kenaf as a substitute for recycled paper in pulp and paper applications.

"As Kenaf development gains momentum, I am very sure other research and development institutions will also seek and we will support funds for fundamental and applied research and commercialisation purposes from the relevant R&D funds available for such purposes," he said.

To ensure adequate institutional and infrastructure support for the Kenaf industry's orderly growth, the ministry would table the National Kenaf and Tobacco Board Bill in Parliament on Monday.

"Hopefully, it will be accepted by the Dewan Rakyat and Dewan Negara and the board can be fully functional by end of this year.

"This will ensure the Kenaf industry will develop and grow along the lines of other matured commodities like rubber, oil palm, cocoa and pepper which all had similar humble beginnings," he added.

-- BERNAMA
