



**LAPORAN LIPUTAN MEDIA HARIAN
SELASA 14 JANUARI 2020**

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LUKKMOA

UNIT KOMUNIKASI KORPORAT
KEMENTERIAN PERTANIAN & INDUSTRI ASAS TANI
(UNTUK EDARAN DALAMAN MOA, JABATAN DAN AGENSI SAHAJA)

TARIKH	MEDIA	RUANGAN	MUKA SURAT
14/1/2020	BERITA HARIAN	ONLINE	

Jabatan Pertanian sasar 50 peratus pokok Musang King menjelang 2022



SERDANG: Jabatan Pertanian menasaskan kira-kira 50 peratus pokok durian Musang King di seluruh negara menjelang tahun 2022 bagi menampung permintaan tinggi terhadap raja buah itu. Ketua Pengarah Jabatan Pertanian, Mohd Nasir Warris, berkata sehingga kini terdapat 569,000 pokok durian Musang King atau kira-kira 36 peratus daripada 1.576 juta pokok durian di seluruh negara.

"Kita menasaskan negara memiliki kira-kira 50 peratus pokok durian Musang King dalam tempoh terdekat kerana permintaan terhadap durian jenis ini amat tinggi.

"Justeru, pelbagai usaha akan dilakukan bagi menambah bilangan pokok durian berkenaan antaranya, membuat cantuman dewasa (cantuman tunas) dengan pokok durian sub standard (kampung) dan melalui penanaman baharu," katanya.

Beliau berkata demikian pada majlis ramah mesra bersama media di Pusat Pertanian Serdang di sini, hari ini.

Mohd Nasir berkata, sasaran itu bagi menggalakkan petani menanam lebih banyak pokok durian Musang King yang terkenal dengan kualitinya berbanding jenis kampung.

"Harga bagi durian jenis Musang King amat tinggi dan sebab itu kita mahu supaya petani menanamnya, sekali gus membantu meningkatkan pendapatan golongan berkenaan.

"Jadi mana-mana petani yang mahu menukarkan pokok mereka daripada durian sub standard kepada Musang King, boleh dapatkan nasihat serta bantuan daripada Pejabat Pertanian di kawasan masing-masing," katanya.

Beliau berkata, Jabatan Pertanian juga mahu Malaysia dikenali dengan identiti sebagai pengeluar durian Musang King di dunia menerusi usaha yang dilakukannya.

TARIKH	MEDIA	RUANGAN	MUKA SURAT
14/1/2020	ASTRO AWANI	ONLINE	

Agrobank: 50 tahun memperkasa pertanian negara



Sebagai sebuah institusi kewangan pembangunan yang khusus untuk sektor pertanian, peranan tersebut dilihat suatu yang cukup mencabar bagi Agrobank.

DALAM tempoh tidak sampai sedekad Merdeka, Malaysia sudah pun menumpukan kepada sektor pertanian bagi memperbaiki taraf sosial ekonomi masyarakat luar bandar seperti yang termaktub dalam Rancangan Malaysia Pertama 1966 – 1970.

Pada ketika itu, pelbagai projek telah dirancang termasuklah rancangan Pengairan Pertanian bagi dua kawasan yang berkeluasan 300,000 ekar iaitu Rancangan Pengairan Muda dan Kemubu.

Bagi tujuan itu, maka tertubuhlah Bank Pertanian Malaysia pada 1969.

Sebagai sebuah institusi kewangan pembangunan yang khusus untuk sektor pertanian, peranan tersebut dilihat suatu yang cukup mencabar.

Perkara itu diakui sendiri oleh bekas Presiden Agrobank, Datuk Martini Osman yang bertanggungjawab di atas pengkorporatan Bank Pertanian Malaysia kepada Agrobank pada 2008.

"Sebagai sebuah negara yang sedang membangun, kita memerlukan sebuah bank (pertanian), dan kita tidak boleh katakan kita tidak memerlukan bank ini kerana terdapat beberapa sektor seperti pertanian dan agrobiz, dan sektor-sektor ini adalah sektor yang besar.

"Dengan masalah keselamatan makanan, jadi kita memerlukan sebuah bank yang menyediakan perkhidmatan berasaskan pelanggan.

"Dan seperti yang anda tahu, pertanian adalah sektor yang sangat berisiko tinggi, yang mana bank komersial yang ada pada ketika itu tidak bersedia untuk menyatakan sokongan mereka berbanding penanaman kelapa sawit dan perladangan, kerana sektor itu diketahui menghasilkan pulangan pada ketika itu," katanya dalam temu bual bersama Astro AWANI, baru-baru ini.

Sebagai pemegang mandat bagi tujuan pembangunan pertanian, Agrobank sentiasa berusaha memastikan akses perkhidmatan kewangan terus dipertingkatkan khususnya bagi komuniti luar bandar agar pertumbuhan ekonomi yang lebih terangkum dapat dicapai.

Jelas Datuk Wan Mohd Fadzmi Wan Othman, yang merupakan bekas Presiden/Ketua Pegawai Eksekutif (CEO) Agrobank bagi tempoh 2011 hingga 2017, institusi perbankan itu berjaya mengambil alih peranan bank komersial lain dengan menyediakan pembiayaan kewangan kepada golongan petani terutamanya di luar bandar.

"Saya fikir kita telah mengubah naratif itu kerana pada masa itu, walaupun kita mempunyai banyak cawangan tetapi keupayaan kita adalah untuk turut sama turun padang bersama petani dan bercakap mengenai hal tanah, pembiayaan mikro, malah berupaya untuk menyediakan perkhidmatan asas perbankan."

"Jadi, secara dasarnya kita bukan sahaja telah melebarkan perkhidmatan kita melangkaui sistem kewangan yang sedia ada malah turut berupaya menyediakan khidmat perbankan pada harga yang berpatutan, mudah diakses.

"Perkhidmatan perbankan sebegini hanya mampu ditawarkan oleh institusi kewangan seperti Agrobank," katanya.

Agrobank lahirkan usahawan baharu

Seiring dengan hala tuju Kementerian Pertanian, Industri Dan Asas Tani, Agrobank terus memainkan peranan penting dalam membantu meningkatkan taraf sosial ekonomi dan pembangunan dengan membimbing dan melahirkan usahawan baharu.

Penanggung Tugas Presiden/Ketua Pegawai Eksekutif Agrobank, Khadijah Iskandar berkata peruntukan dana yang diberikan oleh kerajaan telah dapat menyediakan pembiayaan kepada usahawan, selain membantu mereka mewujudkan peluang pekerjaan baharu dan sekaligus menyediakan platform perniagaan yang mampan.

"Berdasarkan statistik pada 2017, kita telah mencapai lebih kurang 80 peratus dalam agenda 'Kemampuan Perniagaan' dan 'Kebolehan mewujudkan peluang pekerjaan baharu' melalui dana-dana yang kita telah terima namun pada 2018, laporan terkini menunjukkan kita telah mencapai 100 peratus dalam kedua-dua agenda tersebut," ujar beliau.

Dasar Agro Makanan Negara diwujudkan untuk meningkatkan jaminan keselamatan makanan, mewujudkan industri berdaya saing dan mampan, serta meningkatkan pendapatan kumpulan sasar terutama golongan petani, penternak dan nelayan.

"Sektor Agro makanan mengambil kira semua aspek daripada peladang itu sendiri sehinggalah penghasilan produk bagi tujuan pemasaran.

"Justeru, kami di Agrobank menyediakan bantuan kewangan dan projek pembiayaan. Menerusi projek pembiayaan, kita menyediakan produk seperti urusan beli tanah dan tanah pertanian.

"Saya percaya pembiayaan tanah pertanian ini jarang sekali ditawarkan oleh bank komersial, dan jika ada sekalipun, bank komersil ini pastinya menawarkan margin pembiayaan yang tinggi atau jumlah pembiayaan yang ditawarkan juga tidak setinggi yang ditawarkan di Agrobank.

"Jadi, setelah kita bantu mereka dari segi perladangan, kini mereka mungkin sudah bersedia untuk maju selangkah lagi dengan mempunyai kilang bagi tujuan pemprosesan makanan mereka sendiri.

"Dan sudah pasti, kami di Agrobank mempunyai penawaran produk yang bersesuaian bagi merealisasikan hasrat para peladang ini untuk mempunyai kilang mereka sendiri," tambah Khadijah.

Ujarnya lagi, Agrobank turut membantu pelanggan dengan memberikan kadar pembiayaan yang kompetitif serendah 3.75 peratus bagi sektor pengeluaran makanan.

Peningkatan aset pembiayaan

Pertambahan populasi dan permintaan makanan antara penyumbang pertumbuhan yang memberangsangkan.

Pembangunan industri agro makanan kini diutamakan agar ia terus kompetitif dan mampan, selain industri ini mampu meningkatkan daya saing kumpulan sasar.

Analisis Agrobank merekodkan peningkatan aset pembiayaan dalam kebanyakan sektor berkaitan agro makanan.

"Statistik menunjukkan peningkatan yang positif bagi sektor pertanian, terutamanya bagi sektor perikanan."

"Kalau kita melihat industri perbankan komersial, sektor perikanan sebenarnya penyumbang kepada 2.2 peratus tetapi bagi Agrobank, setakat September 2019 telah mencatatkan peningkatan kepada 17.5 peratus.

"Dan yang lebih membanggakan, ia bukan setakat peningkatan kadar semata, malah dari segi jumlah pembiayaan juga.

"Bagi Agrobank, pembiayaan kewangan untuk sektor ini sahaja telah melebihi RM5 juta, di mana ia adalah salah satu contoh sokongan berterusan yang kita mahu tawarkan kepada mana-mana industri," katanya.

Selain itu, Khadijah turut memaklumkan sektor tanaman makanan turut mencatatkan pertumbuhan dua digit iaitu sebanyak 10.2 peratus.

Teknologi bantu tingkatkan produktiviti

Penggunaan teknologi moden seperti penggunaan dron serta automasi pastinya mampu meningkatkan produktiviti dan pemasaran produk sektor agro makanan.

Ia termasuk beberapa projek kerjasama pertanian pintar yang sedang diusahakan atau yang sudah pun membuah hasil.

Pengurus Flow Studios Sdn Bhd, Muzaffar Tajuddin mengakui bahawa kecanggihan teknologi 5G telah memberi banyak manfaat kepada sektor pertanian.

"Banyak peserta ataupun pemain industri boleh saling berhubung menggunakan satu platform yang sama dan ia pastinya menjimatkan kos dan petani itu sendiri

boleh mengendalikan teknologi ini dengan sendirinya. Misalnya, alat bantuan seperti telefon pintar.

"Boleh dikatakan dengan bantuan teknologi seperti telefon pintar, para petani boleh melakukan pelbagai aktiviti termasuk perbankan atas talian, dan juga urusan jua beli hasil pertanian.

"Jadi, saya tidak nampak petani menghadapi sebarang sekatan atau kekangan untuk pergi ke peringkat yang lebih tinggi," kata Muzaffar.

Komuniti luar bandar juga turut didedahkan dengan pelbagai usaha agresif oleh Agrobank bagi membaiki taraf hidup dan merapatkan jurang ekonomi dengan pembiayaan mikro.

Golongan isi rumah berpendapatan rendah (B40) adalah sasaran utama kewangan terangkum dalam sektor pertanian.

Sejak program Pembiayaan Mikro Agro Nisaa' dilancarkan, sebanyak RM1.5 juta jumlah pembiayaan telah diluluskan kepada 250 usahawan tani wanita pada 2019.

Menurut usahawan Agro, Julita Gutong, dengan adanya pembiayaan Mikro Agro Nisaa', ia telah berjaya meningkatkan kualiti produktiviti tanamannya, selain menambah hasil pendapatan serta mampu digunakan sebagai modal pusingan.

Sementara, Irene Tony pula berkata program Pembiayaan Mikro Agro Nisaa' telah memberikan banyak pendedahan kepada beliau mengenai pengurusan modal dan pertanian.

Visi dan hala tuju Agrobank

Bermula dengan pembiayaan kewangan sebanyak RM500,000 yang disediakan kepada lebih kurang 3,000 petani di kawasan pertanian Muda pada 1969, aset pembiayaan Agrobank kini telah mencapai lebih kepada RM11 bilion.

Mengulas mengenai perkara itu, Khadijah berkata sepanjang tempoh lima puluh tahun ini, Agrobank telah mencatatkan pertumbuhan yang amat memberangsangkan terutamanya dari segi pembiayaan kewangan.

"Perunjuk (kepada pencapaian tersebut) adalah jumlah keseluruhan pelanggan dalam sektor pertanian yang sudah kita bantu. Berdasarkan statistik yang dikeluarkan oleh Bank Negara Malaysia, setakat September 2019, secara keseluruhan bank komersial hanya berkembang kira-kira 3.8 peratus.

"Namun bagi Agrobank, setakat September 2019 sahaja, kita sudah mencatatkan pertumbuhan dua digit yang membanggakan iaitu sebanyak 11.7 peratus," tambahnya.

Demi kelangsungan yang lebih mampan, Agrobank terus giat mengorak langkah bagi mencapai visi baharu yang telah dilancarkan oleh Perdana Menteri Malaysia, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamed pada November lalu iaitu "Memperkasakan Pertanian Melangkaui Perbankan", selain misi meningkatkan taraf pertanian dan menyediakan sokongan yang berterusan untuk manfaat komuniti, ekonomi dan pemegang taruh.

Ia termasuklah memainkan peranan dari segi memartabatkan sektor pertanian dan menggalakkan perlibatan golongan belia.

"Jadi, bila kita bercakap soal 'Melangkaui Perbankan', selama ini kita mungkin hanya mengfokuskan kepada pembiayaan kewangan semata dan ia mungkin nampak hanya terhad di situ sahaja. Jadi kini, kita mahu melangkaui daripada sekadar menyediakan pembiayaan kewangan, dengan menawarkan produk-produk baharu yang pastinya 'Melangkaui Perbankan'.

"Maknanya, tidak terhad kepada soal pembiayaan sahaja, kini dan seterusnya mungkin kita boleh menarik minat orang ramai untuk turut sama dengan kita bagi melabur dalam teknologi-teknologi baharu yang mampu membantu sektor pertanian. Antara yang ingin saya realisasikan secepat mungkin adalah berkaitan penawaran perlindungan takaful bagi sektor pertanian yang sedang hangat diperkatakan sekarang ini.

"Kita melihat perkara sebegini adalah peluang penawaran yang sudah menjadi keperluan kepada kita, terutamanya kepada para petani dan pelanggan. Kita juga ingin membuat sesuatu berkaitan pengurusan aset dan khidmat nasihat. Kita telah pun ada Pusat Kecemerlangan atau 'Center of Excellence', maka dengan adanya visi baharu, kita mahu mengembangkan lagi khidmat nasihat yang sedia ada kepada yang lebih menyeluruh," katanya.

Untuk temu bual penuh, anda boleh menonton dokumentari ulang tahun Agrobank yang ke-50 menerusi pautan di bawah

UMK kongsi ilmu ternak ayam dengan orang asli

JELI - Universiti Malaysia Kelantan (UMK) berkongsi kepakaran bersama komuniti orang asli di perkampungan Sungai Rual di sini bagi membantu meningkatkan sumber pendapatan dalam menyara kehidupan.

Timbalan Naib Canselor (Hal Ehwal Pelajar dan Alumni), Prof Dr Zaliman Sauli berkata, kepakaran itu dikongsi melalui industri pertanian dan penternakan kepada penduduk terbabit dengan kerjasama Pusat Khidmat Ahli Parlimen Jeli.

Menurutnya, menerusi kerjasama itu sebanyak 2,000 ekor ayam organik serta 100 reban diberikan kepada 120 keluarga sebagai usaha membantu komuniti itu meningkatkan taraf hidup mereka.

"Mereka bukan sahaja diberikan ayam organik, reban dan dedak, malah kita juga membekalkan ilmu penternakan yang dikongsikan pakar-pakar berkaitan demi menajayakan projek ini.

"Kami mempunyai ahli akademik yang pakar dalam

industri ini dan boleh membantu memberikan ilmu atau teknik penternakan ayam yang dapat dilakukan orang asli di sini dengan betul. Ini merupakan projek ketiga yang mana sebelum ini kita turut memberi bimbingan dalam penternakan ikan keli dan penanaman pisang.

"Inisiatif secara praktikal ini diharapkan dapat memberi pendedahan kepada mereka dalam meningkatkan ekonomi sekali gus menjana pendapatan," katanya.

Beliau berkata demikian selepas merasmikan Program Penerangan Dan Bimbingan Penternakan Ayam Organik Orang Asli Sungai Rual di sini semalam.

Zaliman berkata, kerjasama itu membolehkan pihaknya membantu komuniti setempat dengan kemahiran yang ada dalam kalangan ahli akademik pusat pengajian terbabit khususnya daripada Fakulti Industri Asas Tani (FIAT) melalui bimbingan pengurusan penternakan ayam organik.



Zaliman menyempurnakan gimik penyerahan ayam organik kepada komuniti orang asli di Sungai Rual semalam.

Future of agriculture

How technology can help put food on the table

If agriculture is to continue feeding us it needs to become smart. But first, we need to figure out a "smart" way to entice the millennials into farming. Market data indicate that the average age of Malaysian farmers to be 50 years. What's worse, many are in the Bottom 40 group (B40) and not technology savvy. Some may even be averse to technology. Further complicating this is the migration of millennials to urban areas to eke out a living. Malaysian farms are in urgent need of young hands and technology.

There is, however, some good news. The Agriculture and Agro-based Industry Ministry (MOA) recently announced that it will offer practical training to millennials to help grow the sector by making agriculture attractive to second generation farmers. Currently, the sector employs 1.5 million workers, of whom 492,000 are foreigners. In 2018, the agriculture sector contributed 7.3 per cent or RM99.5 billion to the country's gross domestic product (GDP). There is another factor to consider. Malaysia's food import bill, too, is growing steadily. In 2018, it stood at more than RM50 billion. As former finance minister Tun Dr Daim Zainuddin told the *New Straits Times* on Friday, this figure could be reduced significantly if more people, especially the youth, get involved in the agricultural sector.

Technology, too, needs a boost. A farmer always comes face to face with the vagaries of variables. Add climate change to them and you get the complexity of calculus gone crazy. There is the soil's pH value, weather, pests and other permutations to consider. Not to mention natural disasters. Reduced to the simplest formula, agriculture is all about getting the land to produce the highest yield. Productivity is profit. Here is where the

farmer can get smart. If our best practices of the past were all about approximation, today it is precision agriculture through technology. Where to till, when to sow and how to harvest.

There is an app for everything. Well, almost. To measure moisture in the soil, what nutrients and how much of them the crops need. There are apps, too, to signal to the farmer if he missed sowing a patch or two. Drones and other devices alert him of rodents and other pests. All this information is relayed to his mobile phone for instant access. Farming was never easier.

Take the case of foodstuff production. According to the Institute of Mechanical Engineers' study published by the *Guardian*, growing foodstuffs requires quite a bit of water. Rice, for instance, requires 2,500 litres of water to produce 1kg of it. Other common foodstuffs require less, but still place demand on this scarce resource: banana 790 litres per kg, potatoes 297 litres per kg, cabbage 237 litres per kg and tomatoes 214 litres per kg. Smart sensors and apps can reduce this substantially.

Sadly, the average Malaysian farmer doesn't have the means to go smart. MOA's learning support for second generation farmers is a good beginning. Banks and financial institutions can help, too, by offering financing at competitive rates as Agrobank does. Only thus mass adoption of smart technology can be made to happen. As we are pushing Industrial Revolution 4.0 for adoption in the Malaysian ecosystem generally, the sector that will keep us fed must not be forgotten. Because technology is the future of agriculture.

“If our best practices of the past were all about approximation, today it is precision agriculture through technology.”

Farmers feeling the dry heat

Padi planters worry harvest will be affected by lack of rain

By IMRAN HILMI
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BUKIT MERTAJAM: As the sun in a cloudless sky scorches the land, cracked mud on the padi fields is giving farmers the jitters.

They fear the absence of rain will disrupt their planting schedule and padi production.

Farmer Khalid Daud, 53, has found this year's dry season to be more punishing than previous seasons.

"We can't work on our fields at all now. The irrigation channel is drying up. The irrigation gates are still closed and water is not reaching our fields.

"We are aware that the dry season is set to continue and if no ample water supply comes, I fear the worst," he said.

Khalid, who has been a padi farmer since he was a teenager, said he expected losses of more than 70% of his income compared with a good harvesting season.

"I hope the relevant authorities can do something soon because we don't want our crops to be destroyed," he added.

Another farmer, Mahadzir Abdul Halim, 43, said the problem was not a recent one but had been happening for the past 10 years.

He said ploughing the land was difficult without sufficient water to soak the field.

"It is irritating when it happens. It's not that we deny the hot season is the work of God but there is a solution to this and it has not been executed well by the authorities.



Parched: A dead haruan (common snakehead) fish is seen in a padi field that is drying up near Kampung Permatang Nibong in Permatang Pauh, Bukit Mertajam.

"When this happens, it affects us farmers financially and emotionally. We stand to lose thousands of ringgit when our harvests don't give as much returns as we hope," he said.

Sharkawi Abdul Latif, 35, echoed his feelings and expected the condition to worsen as the hot season reaches its peak in the next few weeks.

"If the water is not pumped in properly, we will never be able to plant in time," he said.

A check on padi fields at Kampung Permatang Rotan, Kubang Semang, Kampung Pertama and Kampung Besar showed vast tracts of land baking in the sun.

Koperasi Kerjaya Permatang

gation on Pinang Tunggal at North Seberang Prai district. We have not received any complaints from Permatang Pauh (In. Central Seberang Prai) yet," she said.

She said the padi planting schedule was laid down every year and once set, farmers must follow the planting schedule strictly according to the zones they were in.

In the schedule, irrigation gates along Sungai Muda in North Seberang Prai are opened in stages to irrigate the fields zone by zone.

Every padi farmer is told by the authorities the dates their gates will be opened, and they will take turns working their fields.

"This has been followed for decades. If we opened all the gates to fill every field at once, Sungai Muda's level will be affected; there will be a shortage of farming machinery for hire like tractors, and if all the fields planted together ripen at the same time, harvesting will be a big problem, too.

"We have requested the Irrigation and Drainage Department (IDD) to monitor the condition and we also sent our field engineers to check on the situation," Noor Mazirah said.

State DID director Shukri Muslim said he had instructed engineers to deploy mobile pumps to the critical areas and constantly monitor the planting areas during the dry season.

Malaysia is in the second phase of the northeast monsoon, which is expected to run until March.

During this period, the northern end of the peninsula gets little to no rain.

Water pumps to be sent to affected farmers

By RAHIMY RAHIM
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SERDANG: The Agriculture Department will mobilise water pumps to padi farmers in several drought-affected areas in Kedah.

"All the water pumps that we have in our storage will be mobilised through our respective state offices to assist the padi farmers," said its director-general Mohd Nasir Warris at a programme with the media yesterday.

He was asked to comment on the ongoing plight of padi farmers due to the severe hot weather in several areas in Kedah.

Several farmers expressed their concern that the prolonged dry season would damage their crops.

The worst affected areas are Kampung Charok Kering, Sungai Jagong and Lubuk Reba in the southern part of Pendang, about a 40-minute drive from Alor Setar.

On a separate matter, Mohd Nasir said the department aimed to market the durian king variety on a large scale and urged local farmers to replace the substandard varieties with higher quality ones.

"We managed to plant about 1.576 million trees across the country.

"The musang king variety makes up about 599,000 trees, contributing about 36% in terms of the total varieties.

"I believe that in the near future, we can increase it to about 50%," he added.

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Farmers feeling the dry heat



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"If the water is not pumped in properly, we will never be able to plant in time," he said.

A check on padi fields at Kampung Permatang Rotan, Kubang Semang, Kampung Pertama and Kampung Besar showed vast tracts of land baking in the sun.

Koperasi Kerjaya Permatang Nibong Pulau Pinang Bhd chairman Rosli Ishak said the farmers' problems were due to delays in irrigation to some padi fields in the area.

He said the problem could be resolved if sufficient water was allowed to flow in from Sungai Muda on time.

"The authorities should not drag it out too long as it will affect ploughing and planting," he said.

State Integrated Agricultural Development Area director Noor Mazirah Teh said the department had not received complaints from the farmers so far.

She said the department understood the farmers' worries every dry season.

"At this time, we are focusing irrigation on Pinang Tunggal at North Seberang Prai district. We have not received any complaints from Permatang Pauh (in Central Seberang Prai) yet," she said.

She said the padi planting schedule was laid down every year and once set, farmers must follow the planting schedule strictly according to the zones they were in.

In the schedule, irrigation gates along Sungai Muda in North Seberang Prai are opened in stages to irrigate the fields zone by zone.

Every padi farmer is told by the authorities the dates their gates will be opened, and they will take turns working their fields.

"This has been followed for decades. If we opened all the gates to fill every field at once, Sungai Muda's level will be affected; there will be a shortage of farming machinery for hire like tractors, and if all the fields planted together ripen at the same time, harvesting will be a big problem, too.

"We have requested the Irrigation and Drainage Department (DID) to monitor the condition and we also sent our field engineers to check on the situation," Noor Mazirah said.

State DID director Shukri Muslim said he had instructed engineers to deploy mobile pumps to the critical areas and constantly monitor the planting areas during the dry season.

Malaysia is in the second phase of the northeast monsoon, which is expected to run until March.

During this period, the northern end of the peninsula gets little to no rain.