

# Charting path for rice self-sufficiency

## S'wak to allocate 20,000 ha for high-yield cultivation to raise production rate from current 36 per cent



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**KUCHING:** The Sarawak government plans to allocate about 20,000 hectares of land for high-yield rice cultivation and raise the current rice production rate of 36 per cent to a self-sustaining 100 per cent.

Premier Datuk Patinggi Tan Sri Abang Johari Tun Openg said to achieve this goal, substantial funding will be allocated to develop rice cultivation in both the southern region including Simunjan, Gedong and Sri Aman, as well as the northern region covering Limbang, Lawas and parts of Bekenu.

According to him, such a budget is necessary especially for irrigation – a critical factor in rice cultivation.

"I am confident that by 2030, Sarawak can produce the required rice for the local market and if there is a surplus, we can sell it abroad," he said in a press conference after officiating the Jelapang Padi and Stumbin Certified Paddy Seed Production and Processing Centre (SPPC) in Sri Aman yesterday.

Abang Johari also announced plans to experiment on 1,500 hectares of government-owned land in Sri Aman, incorporating new agricultural technologies, and expressed his hopes that private landowners will follow suit in adopting modern paddy planting techniques.

"The Sarawak government is keen on embracing new technologies and hybrid seeds.



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Datuk Patinggi Tan Sri Abang Johari Tun Openg

I tried one seed from Vietnam, which has shown the potential for higher yield," he said.

He added that a study conducted with Universiti Putra Malaysia showed one hectare of paddy field could be cultivated for five seasons within 24 months, yielding eight tonnes of rice.

"This will serve as a paddy cultivation model for other areas."

In response to queries about the impact on rice prices, Abang Johari cited the challenges posed by importing rice, especially due to the depreciation of the ringgit.

### 'Paddy production in S'wak started declining from 2018 onwards'

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Thus, he stressed the importance of Malaysia – particularly Sarawak – achieving self-sufficiency to mitigate the volatility of import prices.

"Malaysia must be prepared earlier and the steps I am taking in Sarawak are because we have land we can use with our technology to contribute to the nationwide supply of rice," he said.

A report released by think tank Khazanah Research Institute last year noted that paddy production in Sarawak had been relatively stable throughout the 2000s and only started declining from 2018 onwards. It attributed the decline to repurposing of paddy areas to the planting of other crops, or for other developments.

The report also mentioned that Malaysia's rice production in 2021 amounted to 1.68 million metric tonnes, of which 90.5 per cent was contributed by the peninsula, Sarawak (5.3 per cent), and Sabah (4.2 per cent).

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