

## Minister: RM100m allocation for rubberised roads in ports, industrial areas



Teresa Kok speaks to reporters during a press conference at the Ministry of Primary Industries January 3, 2019. — Picture by Miera Zulyana

KUANTAN, Feb 11 — The government has allocated RM100 million this year for the maintenance and construction of roads using cuplump modified bitumen (CMB) in ports and industrial areas.

Primary Industries Minister Teresa Kok Suh Sim said based on a cost of between RM40 and RM45 per square metre, between 150 and 200 kilometres of such roads can be built.

However, she said this would depend on the current costs of raw materials, adding she hoped the Malaysian Rubber Board (MRB) and Public Works Department could set up a working committee to ensure more effective implementation.

"These rubberised roads could help raise the incomes of some smallholders involved in the planned rubber supply chain model, and this project is expected to significantly increase the use of local rubber in future if continuously implemented," she said.

She made the remarks when launching the 'Planters' Tea Talk' here today attended by MRB director-general Datuk Dr Zairossani Mohd Nor, under-secretary of the ministry's Rubber and Jatropha Industry Development Division Wan Ahmad Asmady Wan Md Din, and International Institute of Plantation Management (IIPM) executive director Halid Hasbullah Boestamam.

Kok said since the signing of the CMB research commercialisation agreement in 2015, 46 kilometres of rubberised roads using CMB have been completed nationwide.

"Studies show that CMB rubberised roads are longer lasting than conventional roads in terms of resistance to surface cracks, ageing, fatigue and skid resistance.

"These factors could lower long-term maintenance costs as CMB rubberised roads can last twice as long as conventional roads besides reducing noise and increasing road users' comfort," she said.

She also gave an assurance that the government would work hard to raise the incomes and living standards of smallholders, including by working with International Tripartite Rubber Council (ITRC) members Thailand and Indonesia to strengthen natural rubber prices.

She said the average price of Standard Malaysia Rubber (SMR) 20 in 2018 was RM5.44 per kilogram compared to RM7.04 sen per kilogram a year earlier, with the lowest price recorded at RM4.97 per kilogram on Nov 21.

"The low price was due, among others, to the trade tensions between China and the United States, low rubber market prices, higher natural rubber production in Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam and Cambodia, weak global economic growth, and currency uncertainty in rubber exporting countries," she said.

The ministry is hoping better prospects this year for the rubber industry, which provides incomes for nearly 440,000 rubber smallholders nationwide and 75,136 workers in the downstream sector, she added.

She noted that the MRB and IIPM have signed a memorandum of understanding on collaboration in education and training to meet the needs of the rubber industry, through IIPM and the MRB-owned Academy Hevea Malaysia (AHM).

She said AHM offers short- and long-term courses, including an 18-month full-time rubber technology course that is awaiting certification as a level 3 skills course under the Skills Development Department of the Human Resources Ministry. — Bernama