

MB: Gov't's poverty line not reflective of situation

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Selangor Menteri Besar Azmin Ali has urged the federal government to raise the poverty line to at least RM 1,500 a month in order to face "current realities" in the economic landscape.

Azmin told a forum on inequality held in Shah Alam today that the number of Malaysians considered to be living below the poverty group would rise significantly to 40 percent of the population if Putrajaya revises its poverty line index, which currently stands at only RM 900 a month.

"For a start, Putrajaya can increase the poverty line index so as to reflect the current reality. We could start with RM 1,500 following the Selangor government," he said.

At the forum, DAP's Klang MP Charles Santiago said the poverty line right now was unrealistic as the rental of a room is costing as much as the minimum wage in some places.

The call is pertinent as the country braces for the implementation of the Goods and Services Tax next month, a move that many have criticised as likely to cause inflation and burden the poor, as wages remain low and the ringgit continues to depreciate.

Santiago (right) also called for the government to revamp its whole model of helping the poor and its economic trickle down system, "which clearly has not worked".

He warned that Malaysia is now creating an "underclass" that is even lower than the lower income group.

"There is a cost of living crisis in Malaysia now," he said.

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