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'OUR ECONOMIC PLAN IS WORKING'

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PM says policies, resilience helped nation through turbulent times

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DESPITE a period of great uncertainty and change across the world last year, the Malaysian government has remained steadfast in its commitment to build a safer, more prosperous and more equitable society, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak.

In his New Year message yesterday, Najib said the government was successful in keeping the budget deficit, inflation and unemployment low.

"The resilience we have been building in our economy has seen us through times of global turbulence. Our economic plan is working.

"Our estimated growth rate of 4.3 per cent to 4.5 per cent for this year is one that developed countries in Europe and North America can only dream of," he said in a statement published on his website, www.najibrazak.com.

This growth, said Najib, was reported by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which concluded that the Malaysian economy continued to perform well despite headwinds.

He said IMF had praised the government for implementing policies of diversification, exchange rate flexibility and deepened financial markets, reforms for female labour participation, improvement of edu-



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak taking the MRT after launching Phase One of the MRT Sungai Buloh-Kajang Line from Sungai Buloh to Semantan recently. PIC BY SAIRIEN NAFIS

cation quality, productivity enhancement, infrastructure investment, and promoting research and development.

Independent assessments such as these, added Najib, were conducted by the world's top experts and reflected the true picture of Malaysia.

"(They are) contrary to the smear campaigns of those who have been trying to sabotage the country's economy for their selfish political objectives.

"I urge Malaysians not to fall for lies. Fake news and the proliferation of false stories have become a worldwide phenomenon, and are a grave problem in our country as well," he said.

Although the IMF report and gross domestic product growth figures

might seem remote to many Malaysians, Najib assured the public that the government was committed to easing the burden of those who struggled to afford a decent life for their families.

"This is why in the 2017 Budget, we focused on the needs of the Bottom 40 and Middle 40 groups, and announced measures to ensure that no one is left behind, from new affordable housing, to tax relief, and nutritional food packages for hundreds of thousands of school children.

"Our efforts to improve the well-being of Malaysians are underlined by a commitment to good governance. I thank those in our civil service for the work they have done and continue to do to improve efficiency, and ensure that government alloca-

tions are used in the most meaningful manner."

Najib, who is also finance minister, added that the government's large-scale infrastructure projects would help the country achieve sustainable growth that could be shared equitably in the long run.

He said the launch of the Mass Rapid Transit and the third phase of the Light Rail Transit, as well as projects, such as Rapid Pengerang, Bandar Malaysia, Tun Razak Exchange, the Pan-Borneo Highway and the Kuala Lumpur-Singapore High Speed Rail, would create job opportunities and stimulate local economies.

"The Pan-Borneo Highway, for instance, will not only connect Serudong in Sabah to Semantan in Sarawak, it will also help re-energise

towns along the way.

"I am determined to see this project through as I know the number of communities, many of whom I have visited, that will benefit from it."

He said Malaysia last year had continued to speak out against extremism and radicalisation.

The government, said Najib, had successfully requested a gathering of Asean foreign ministers to discuss possible solutions to the Rohingya conflict in Myanmar.

He said Malaysia remained committed to supporting the quest for peace in the Middle East when it adopted a resolution against illegal settlements in Palestinian territories by the United Nations Security Council.

On the home front, he said, the police and armed services had successfully prevented attacks by the Islamic State (IS) terror group after Malaysia suffered its first IS-linked attack in June.

"I would like to thank our police and armed forces for their efforts in assuring Malaysians that the government will always be vigilant.

"We will always prioritise the security and welfare of the rakyat."

In his message, Najib expressed his gratitude to the 14th Yang di-Pertuan Agong, Tuanku Abdul Halim Mu'adzam Shah, for his service to the country and welcomed Sultan Muhammad V as the 15th Yang di-Pertuan Agong.

He also lauded the spirit of unity shown by Malaysians through the successes of the country's athletes in the Rio de Janeiro Olympic and Paralympic Games.

"I took pride in the way Malaysians came together to support the national team. It was a reflection of 1 Malaysia.

"I ask Malaysians to be united in this spirit, and I wish you a happy, safe and prosperous New Year."