

The challenges that lie ahead

A new year opens up new opportunities and a new set of trials

2020
VISION

PETALING JAYA: Malaysians can expect many changes in 2020, as we embark on a new decade.

The biggest event on the nation's calendar is the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) Summit.

The summit, which is scheduled to conclude in November, is significant not only in terms of regional politics, but domestically as well, since it is linked to the expected premiership transition from incumbent Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad to PKR president Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

While reiterating that he will keep his promise to hand over the reins to Anwar, Dr Mahathir has said he does not want a leadership change before the Apec summit as it would be "disruptive".

"I made a promise to hand over and I will, accepting that I thought that a change immediately before the Apec summit would be disruptive."

"As far as I'm concerned, I'm stepping down and I'm handing the baton to him (Anwar). If people don't want him, that is their business, but I will do my part of the promise," he had said earlier.

With Dr Mahathir's signalling the extension of his premiership beyond the two-year mark, anticipation is building up as many Malaysians wait with bated breath to see the leadership change finally take place.

The Apec summit will also be a high-profile affair, with Malaysia hosting it for the second time. The country last played host in 1998, also under the leadership of Dr Mahathir in his first tenure as prime minister.

About 16,000 delegates are expected to attend more than 120 meetings in five cities around Malaysia throughout the year.

With the theme "Optimising Human Potential Towards a Future of Shared Prosperity", the summit will focus on driving trade and investment, spurring digital economy and technology, and ramping up innovative sustainability.

Meanwhile, the Sarawak state election must be held before September 2021, leading some to speculate that it could take place this year.

The Gabungan Parti Sarawak (GPS) state government said they are gearing up for the fight, as they defend their position against Pakatan Harapan and other political parties.

Outside our borders

The dynamics of Malaysia's political scene will be crucial in determining the country's future as the leadership continues to navigate a dampened economy - both locally and globally.

However, external developments will also play a role in setting the

What is in store for 2020

High-profile events

> Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) Summit

The meetings involving about 16,000 delegates will be held throughout the year until November. Tied to the summit is the expected premiership transition from Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad to Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

> Unesco World Book Capital

Kuala Lumpur is named the World Book Capital, with special events starting in April.

> Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics 2020

Malaysian athletes will be representing the country in the major international sports events in July.



> Kuala Lumpur International Logistics and Transport Exhibition

The inaugural event in July is set to boost Malaysia's profile as a regional transport hub.

course. US President Donald Trump's impeachment, over charges of power abuse and obstructing Congress, will see him facing a trial in the Senate.

Analysts say that the Republican-led Senate is unlikely to remove Trump from power, but they also noted that he would be bearing the stain of the impeachment in his 2020 re-election bid.

Closer to home, Malaysia's neighbour across the Causeway is likely to call for a general election in 2020, with observers speculating that it could take place after the Budget is announced in February.

A signal that Singapore is heading to the polls includes the formation of the Electoral Boundaries Review Committee on Aug 1, 2019.

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, who came to power in 2004, has indicated that the general election will likely be his last.

Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat is poised to be the next premier of the island-state in what is largely seen as a transitional general election.

Tourism

Besides the Apec summit, Malaysia is also expected to see an upsurge in tourist arrivals as Visit Malaysia 2020 will be underway (see graphics on page 5).

Tourism industry players and agencies are gearing up to make the best use of the year-long campaign, which targets 30 million international tourist arrivals and RM100bil in revenue.

Various initiatives, including the use of digital marketing and social media influencers, are in place to promote popular tourist sites in the country.

Kuala Lumpur has also been named the Unesco World Book Capital for 2020, which will see a variety of special events being held all year starting April 23.

With the theme "KL Baca (KL Reads)", there are plans underway for the construction of a book city (Kota Buku Complex), a reading campaign for train commuters, and digital services for 12 libraries in low-income areas in the city.

Wages and allowances

For ordinary Malaysians, a number of government policies to ease the burden of the rising cost of living is also set to take off in 2020.

Minimum monthly wages will be bumped up to RM1,200 in 57 cities and municipality councils across the country.

The cities that will be seeing an increase in minimum wage include Kuala Lumpur, Johor Baru, Petaling Jaya, Melaka, Penang, Kuala Terengganu, Ipoh, Miri and Kota Kinabalu.

The Bantuan Sara Hidup (BSH) aid will also cast its net wider, as single individuals aged above 40 earning less than RM2,000 monthly are now eligible for the scheme.

The Cost of Living Allowance for civil servants will also be increased by RM50 per month beginning this year.

Transport sector

Several policy changes are also expected to shake up the transport industry in the country.

Indonesian-based motorcycle-hailing firm Gojek and local firm Dego Ride will also disrupt the market with their entry into the Malaysian transportation scene this year.

The companies will be providing their services on a limited scale, with a six-month trial run in Kuala Lumpur.

Starting this year, the government will also fully enforce its ruling on the use of rear seatbelts in cars, which has been been mandatory since 2009.

The use of child seats and seat-

Policies to take off in 2020

> Minimum wages will be increased to RM1,200 in 57 cities and municipality councils.

> Plastic straw ban and smoking ban will take effect.

> Car rear seat belts will be made mandatory.

> A 6% tax will be imposed on digital services from foreign companies.

> Toll rates expected to be reduced by at least 18% across all PLUS Highways.

> Indonesian bike-hailing firm Gojek and local startup Dego Ride will be operating in Kuala Lumpur

under a pilot project.

> Health protection plan mySalam and Peka40 will be expanding its coverage

> Immigration Department will start clamping down on illegal foreign workers

> Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) will be able to prosecute business entities under a new clause in the MACC Act.

> Free breakfast will be provided for primary school children in 100 primary schools nationwide.

Anticipated movies

> The Garden of Evening Mists, based on a book by Malaysian author Tan Twan Eng.

> Raya and the Last Dragon, the first Disney princess of South-East Asian origin.



The Star - 2/1/2020 Pg. 2

belts for bus passengers will also now be fully enforced.

Toll rates, meanwhile, are expected to be reduced by at least 18% across all PLUS highways, as announced in Budget 2020.

The Transport Ministry also announced that the country will be hosting the inaugural Kuala Lumpur International Logistics and Transport Exhibition (KILAT) 2020, in a bid to boost Malaysia's image as a regional transport hub.

The expo, which will be held from July 8-11, is expected to draw exhibitors from Asean and other nations, such as the United States, Germany, and the United Kingdom.

Health coverage expands

The mySalam health protection plan will also be expanded to include middle-income individuals; that is, Malaysians with an annual gross income of up to RM100,000.

The maximum age of those eligible will also be increased to 65 from 55.

The scheme will also be expanded to cover 45 critical illnesses and polio, instead of the current 36 critical illnesses.

Meanwhile, the Skim Peduli Kesihatan (Peka40) will also be expanded to include individuals from age 40, while previously it was only open for those aged 50 to 60.

Smoking and plastic straw bans

Malaysians will also see the smoking ban being fully enforced this year, with the educational period officially ending in 2019.

This means that smokers who violate the ban face a fine of up to RM10,000 or two years' jail.

Eateries will also not use plastic straws as their ban will be fully enforced in 2020.

Clampdown on illegal migrant workers

The Immigration Department

will start clamping down on illegal foreign workers, as the deadline for the Back for Good (B4G) repatriation programme ends.

There will be no extension of the amnesty programme, which allows illegal workers to return to their countries voluntarily.

Legal matters

The Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) will be given more bite as a new clause in the MACC Act will give it prosecutorial powers over business entities, and not just individuals.

The newly introduced Section 17A of the MACC Act will take effect in June.

Meanwhile, the Bill to repeal the mandatory death penalty is expected to be tabled in Parliament in March.

Youth aid

Free breakfast will be provided for primary school children, with the first phase of the programme implemented at 100 primary schools nationwide in January.

To encourage e-wallet use, the government will credit RM30 into the e-wallet of Malaysians aged 18 years and above, who earn an annual income below RM100,000.

The money, which will be credited today, will be valid for two months.

The government will also be giving a leg up to young Malaysians by extending the deadline of the Youth Housing Scheme from January 2020 to December 2021.

The scheme, administered by Bank Simpanan Nasional, offers a 10% loan guarantee through Cagamas (the National Mortgage Corporation) to give borrowers access to full financing while providing a RM200 monthly instalment assistance for the first two years, limited to 10,000 home units.