

PM: NEED TO ENSURE SOCIAL SAFETY NETS

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'Innovative social protection solutions vital to promote financial resilience'

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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob has called on policymakers to recognise the role of social protection in promoting the people's wellbeing and craft effective policies that consider their voices.

He said it was vital to have new and innovative social protection solutions to strike a balance between the provision of safety nets, promote financial resilience and human capital development.

"Issues pertaining to the current social protection framework need to be addressed.

"This is to ensure Malaysia will be able to meet its aspiration of becoming a developed nation," he said at the launch of the International Social Wellbeing Conference 2021 yesterday.

The event was jointly organised by the Employees Provident Fund, Finance Ministry, the Implementation and Coordination Unit of the Prime Minister's Office and the International Social Security Association.

Present were Finance Minister Tengku Datuk Seri Zafrul Tengku Abdul Aziz, EPF chairman Tan Sri Ahmad Badri Mohd Zahir and EPF chief executive officer Datuk Seri Amir Hamzah Azizan.

Ismail Sabri said it was vital that the public and private sectors collaborate more to form strong synergies between social security organisations, stakeholders and policymakers.

"Quick responses are required to uplift the community, promote rights and bridge social protection gaps in the country, especially for the informal economy workers, housewives, or unpaid family workers, such as caregivers.

"Since Covid-19 struck, we quickly learnt that social protection systems, including social assistance, social insurance and labour market policies, can act as automatic stabilisers during a cri-

sis, as well as essential safety nets for poor and vulnerable citizens.

"The 12th Malaysia Plan's focus on the people's welfare, social protection and people-centred projects in light of Covid-19 aims to rejuvenate Malaysia's socio-economic development for long-term sustainability and prosperity as the foundation in improving the wellbeing of the people," he added.

He said this would be yet another stepping stone for the country to move closer to the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals 2030 Agenda, with the government aiming to fulfil one of the national development priorities by adopting a whole-of-nation approach on the principle of "leaving no one behind".

This was also further supported by the recently launched Keluarga Malaysia concept, he added, which was based on three main values: inclusivity, common ground and contentment.

Ismail Sabri said as a Keluarga Malaysia, everyone should work together to establish a stronger social support system towards greater resiliency, especially for poor and vulnerable groups.

"If there is one thing we can take solace on from this crisis, it is the nation's ability to do things the Malaysian way.

"After all, a Malaysian crisis requires a Malaysian solution. The Malaysian solution in this context is the government's commitment to strengthen and increase research activities under the Malaysia Social Protection Council.

"This council serves as a centralised coordinating body to develop a comprehensive national social security approach, which is based on lifecycle needs, encompasses effective and efficient policies, and is backed by credible, broad-based, inclusive infrastructure and legal framework."

He said the past two years of the Covid-19 pandemic had been tough on everyone, costing peo-



Social Welfare Department staff organising baskets of food and other essentials for residents of a block of flats placed under the Enhanced Movement Control Order in Petaling Jaya, Selangor, in August. FILE PIC

ple their jobs and livelihoods, and resulting in far-reaching social and economic consequences to the country.

He said absolute poverty increased from 5.6 per cent in 2019 to 8.4 per cent in 2020, while relative poverty rose to 16.9 per cent, with a 10.3 per cent decrease in mean monthly household gross income, from RM7,901 in 2019 to RM7,089 in 2020.

Hardcore poverty was also estimated to increase from 0.04 per cent in 2019, involving 27,200 households, to 1.0 per cent involving 78,000 households, he said.

"Household income was also greatly impacted. About 20 per cent of M40 households with incomes of between RM4,850 and RM10,959, slid into the B40 category, while 12.8 per cent of T20 households shifted into M40.

"Unemployment rates during the first lockdown last year increased to 5.3 per cent, the highest in 27 years since 1993.

"Thankfully, it has progressively receded to 4.6 per cent in August 2021," said Ismail Sabri.

Based on the Economic Outlook 2022 report published by the Finance Ministry, he said the unemployment rate was anticipated to return to four per cent in 2022.

"*Insyallah*, the gradual normalisation of economic activities to pre-pandemic levels would