

Measuring Keluarga Malaysia concept using happiness is refreshing

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THE 2022 Budget, to be unveiled tomorrow, will be the first for Prime Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob.

It's also the first since the launch of the 12th Malaysia Plan (12MP). But above all else, the budget will become a critical enabler to rebuild and reform the economy in the post-pandemic era.

As with the 12MP, the underlying theme of the Budget is expected to be the Keluarga Malaysia concept, launched by Ismail Sabri in Kuching, Sarawak, recently.

In monitoring the concept and to put it into action, the Key Happiness Outcome (KHO) has been introduced. KHO will be based in the World Happiness Report (WHR), which measures countries' level of happiness.

This is refreshing, as the notion of Keluarga Malaysia must be quantified, measured, and most importantly, felt by all so that it will not become another rhetoric.

Equally crucial, the targets and measurements of Keluarga Malaysia are universal and in-



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clusive in nature.

Since the 2022 Budget is the first budget under the 12MP, it must put the target of where should Malaysia be in the WHR for next year, as well as the final target at the end of the 12MP.

Thus, as we aspire to transform the economy into a high-income nation by 2025, as stated in the 12MP, perhaps we should also rank better in the WHR by 2025. Maybe in the top 20 by 2025?

This year, Malaysia ranks 81st. In 2018, Malaysia ranked 35th, our best performance since the report was launched in 2013 by the United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network. Since then, our ranking has dropped to 80th in 2019 and 82nd last year.

WHR measures development

in a multidimensional manner and looks at other indicators of human development and prosperity, besides gross domestic product.

Many domains of individual and societal happiness — such as psychological, health, time-balance, community, social support, education, art and culture, environment, governance, material wellbeing, work, corruption, quality of life and freedom — are included.

The latest WHR also focuses on the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, specifically how the virus affects the quality of people's lives and happiness, and how well governments deal with the pandemic.

So besides the government's commitment to achieve the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and the digitalisation agenda, the government, under the 2022 Budget, should embark on improving our ranking in the WHR from next year.

Indeed, improving our ranking would mean that Malaysians are better able to cope with challenges to their lives and livelihoods.

An improvement in the ranking will tell us a lot about the government's performance in addressing the pandemic compared with other countries.

Where do we begin? There is no doubt that the allocation for the health sector must be increased, making sure we are ready for any health crisis in the future.

Secondly, it is about time we acknowledge our frontliners. A one-off bonus is not enough. Even before the pandemic, it was clear that frontliners were underpaid.

It's time to fix this injustice and show our appreciation for what they have done during the pandemic.

The economy is now in recovery mode, but instead of a V-shaped recovery, we are going to see a K-shaped recovery.

Thus, there are segments in society, if left unattended, will be left behind. These include people who have lost their jobs and are struggling to put food on the table.

Measures, like direct cash assistance, loan moratorium, special grant and wage subsidy, should continue.

Perhaps this time, the government, banks and other agencies could forgive individual or household debt, or in economic terms, a write-off.

Of course, it must be done carefully and on a case-by-case basis. Perhaps this can be extended to micro, small- and medium-scale enterprises (MSMEs) and small businesses in the informal sector.

With regard to cash aid programmes, it is about time the government experiments with a universal basic income policy to make cash aid continuous and sustainable.

Call it a Keluarga Malaysia basic income scheme.

In articulating, defining, and measuring the Keluarga Malaysia concept, happiness is key.

It will make the high-income nation agenda more meaningful to Malaysians and not just seen as focusing on growth. The fine details must start with the 2022 Budget.

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