

# An inclusive 12th Malaysia Plan

The Star - 3/10/2021 pg-12

The Prime Minister leans on the Malaysian Family concept in charting the country's future, as 'A family is inclusive, we will not let differences in opinion and religion, distance and borders separate us'.



By MAZWIN NIK ANIS & JOSEPH KAOS Jr  
sunday@thestar.com.my

IN his first face to face media interview since he took over the top post and fresh from tabling the 12th Malaysia Plan, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob speaks about how the plan is tailored to meet the aspirations and needs of the people, address socio-economic challenges, and reset the economy following the Covid-19 pandemic.

He also describes how relatively calm Parliament has been since the signing of the memorandum of understanding with the Opposition and why he chose the Malaysian Family concept for the plan.

**Were there changes made to the 12th Malaysia Plan when you took over as Prime Minister?**

The Malaysian Family theme was included in the Plan. A prosperous, inclusive and sustainable Malaysia Plan was intended to enable us to move forward by restructuring the economy as the foundation to improving the well-being of the people. Also, I want to ensure that the policies we present are people-centric.

While mega projects that have been planned will proceed, new ones should be private sector driven. Government funds should focus on projects that will directly benefit the people, such as affordable housing, connectivity, roads, power, and water supply.

I was involved in discussions and planning the 12MP from the beginning. Former prime minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin had roped in senior ministers and

several others to look at how the plan should be formulated. I had proposed that defence and security be included in the plan. Aside from bread and butter issues, the public is also concerned about security and safety. We need to make the people feel safe and assured that we are looking out for their safety.

**The plan is being presented at a time of great uncertainty - we are facing a health and economic double crisis, after all. What do you say to those who are sceptical that it can be implemented?**

The Covid-19 pandemic has affected global economic growth, which shrank 3.2% in 2020, causing a rise in poverty. We were not spared.

During the 11th Malaysia plan [2016-2020], the average GDP was 2.7% annually, lower than our initial target. It shrank by 5.6% last year although growth was at 4.9% annually in the first four years of the 11MP.

The rather low achievement of 11MP required the government to draft policies and strategies that

are more encompassing so that the economy can be on track for long-term growth.

Drafting the 12MP was indeed a challenge. It took us 29 months - from April 16, 2019, until it was tabled in Parliament on Monday, Sept 27.

Taking into account the effects of the pandemic, the government reviewed strategies and priorities so that they are in line with the current situation. We set optimistic and realistic targets.

We must kickstart and heal the economy and shift our focus to creating high value added products and services, using the most advanced technology.

At the same time, efforts will also be made to ensure the well-being of the Malaysian Family, to eradicate hardcore poverty and lessen income and development gaps.

We will also ensure that development is sustainable without compromising the environment.

**Did the Opposition provide input in drafting the plan?**

We had several sessions with them to hear their views and suggestions as they, too, are stakeholders. We also called on industries, groups, business associations, community leaders, civil society groups and state governments to hear them out.

This is not just for the 12MP but similar sessions were held when drafting the Budget.

After the plan was presented in Parliament, we called all lawmakers in to provide more explanation. For the first time in Parliament's history, we brought MPs from the government and Opposition together for the briefing. I said there was no need for briefings



**Man with a plan:** Ismail Sabri with the 12th Malaysia Plan just after presenting it in Parliament on Monday.

to be held separately, let's bring everyone together for this session.

When the Economic Planning Unit director-general gave his briefing, there was no disruption. All questions were focused on the plan.

**The spirit behind the Malaysia Agreement 1963 is to see Peninsular Malaysia, Sarawak and Sabah be treated as equal partners. Is this reflected in the 12MP?**

Socioeconomic development in Sabah and Sarawak remains one of the government's main agendas. The 12MP spells out 16 strategies and five priority areas to strengthen socioeconomic development in the two states.

The priorities will be to overcome issues such as poverty, to solidify the provision of infrastructure by constructing bridges and upgrading 1,400km of rural roads, to ensure completion of the 1,150km Pan-Borneo highway and look into low broadband coverage.

To improve power supply, a new power plant will be built in Sabah and the east-west power grid will be upgraded. For Sarawak, the construction of the Baleh hydroelectric power plant is expected to be completed in 2025.

To boost security and for Sabah and Sarawak to benefit from economic ties with Kalimantan [in Indonesia], new border control posts will be built in Manulunan, Simanggaris and Kalabakan in Sabah while the CIQ [Customs, Immigration and Quarantine] complexes in Tebedu and Serikin in Sarawak will be upgraded.

The government will strive to ensure balanced development is implemented across regions and states, including Sabah and Sarawak.

As for the Malaysia Agreement

1963, the rights of Sabah and Sarawak will continue to be reviewed through working cooperation established under the Special Council on the Malaysia Agreement.

**What measures will be taken to tackle poverty under the 12MP?**

Because of the pandemic, the landscape has changed. There are people in the B40 (low income) category who are now hardcore poor. Some previously in the M40 (middle) income bracket are now in the B40 group.

Under 12MP, the target is to eradicate hardcore poverty by the end of 2025. To do this, mechanisms will be made more effective, several policies, strategies and initiatives from the previous Malaysia plans have been improved and included in the 12MP.

For instance, prior to this, there was no monitoring after assistance is given to the poor: We help a person to set up a roti canai stall, gave him money and equipment for him to start a business. But after that, we don't monitor his progress, we don't know if he is doing well or if he needs help because he is new to business.

In terms of granting aid and assistance, there is no dedicated body to monitor who is giving what to whom. As a result, some people will get aid from three different agencies and there are some who do not get any help at all.

We are looking at coordinating all this under district offices so there will be better distribution of aid and that outcomes of assistance are collated. Only then can we know if our programmes bear fruit.

The government plans to draw up a policy on poverty, taking on approaches based on data and to set up a centralised poverty database to facilitate handing out assistance.

Poverty eradication programmes will be improved by roping in local authorities, community leaders, government agencies and civil society organisations so that programmes will directly involve the grassroots.

**One of the objectives of the 12MP is to strengthen the Malaysian Family agenda - please elaborate on this.**

Our aim is to ensure a socioeco-



Ismail Sabri: 'I hope we can work together for the country to heal and recover from the pandemic as a family.' - Photos: Bernama