

12MP midterm review

A dedicated civil service holds the key to its success

THE 12 Malaysia Plan (12MP) midterm review has some big, bold moves in waiting. A peek into this was given by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim when he tabled the midterm review in the Dewan Rakyat yesterday morning. He took almost all of 100 minutes to prepare the people for a sustainable, prosperous and high-income Malaysia on the back of a Madani economy. Big, bold moves take time to explain, especially if they involve shifts in policies, strategies and targets. Concepts and phrases were aplenty, but all told, there were 17 bold measures and 71 initiatives. A five-year plan worth RM415 billion — increased from RM400 billion when it first saw life in 2021 — for a nation with a debt of RM1.5 trillion is indeed big on spending and bold on promises. More on the promises later. But would it be so in 2025 when the 12MP ends? It depends critically on a dedicated public service. Malaysia plans have failed in meeting their targets before, even as recently as the 11MP. Yes, there is many a slip between the cup and the lips. Anwar is very aware of this. It is for this reason that he quoted the famous English economist John Maynard Keynes in warning that no economic plan can succeed without a dedicated civil service. To make sure that the 12MP's big and bold initiatives get implemented, he has set up a task force. Good idea, but here, too,

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Anwar must be bold. He must make it accountable. Accountability improves dedication. A fair few civil servants failed, only to return to fail again. This must not happen under the Madani Economy. No government agency must be allowed to miss on 12MP's implementation.

Now for the promises. Malaysia wants to be a high-income nation, but to race to such a target when there are still a troubling number of

Malaysians who are poverty-ridden would be meaningless. But the 12MP midterm review target is cleverly careful: zero per cent extreme poverty by 2025. May still be a challenge given that 18,445 households, or 73,780 people, are said to be extremely poor. We hope the poor — defined as those earning RM2,589 and less — are not forgotten, especially given the socioeconomic focus of the 12MP midterm review. The number of our urban poor is on the rise, from 3.9 per cent in 2019 to 4.5 per cent last year, according to the 2022 Household Income and Expenditure Survey conducted by the Department of Statistics Malaysia, while rural poverty was still at a high of 12 per cent. A promise to keep a watch on is the smart public-private partnership that is to see global technology players contributing to sustainable manufacturing and more. The plan's target is to make the digital economy contribute 25.5 per cent to our gross domestic product.

No economic plan in Malaysia will be complete without having a corruption governance target. If the past plans didn't have a specific target, the 12MP midterm review rectifies it by aiming to be among the top 25 in Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index in 10 years. Looks like we have to live through another two more Malaysia plans before we get there. Of all the targets canvassed in the 12MP midterm review, this must be written in Big Bold letters.