

# SARA DISBURSEMENT STARTS ON FEB 9

Recipients of STR in low-income category to get monthly RM200 stipend from Jan 9

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PRIME Minister D'atuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said the one-time RM100 Bantuan Sumbangan Asas Rahmah (Sara) will be credited to all citizens aged 18 and above beginning on Feb 9.

"This is for this year's Ramadan and Chinese New Year preparations," he said at the Prime Minister's Department's monthly ad-

dress here yesterday.

The Sara assistance can be used to buy essential items across 14 product categories at over 4,000 participating outlets nationwide.

Anwar said recipients of the Sumbangan Tunai Rahmah (STR) in the low-income category would get their monthly stipend of RM200 from Jan 9.

For other eligible recipients, the first phase of STR cash handouts of RM500 will be credited into their accounts on Jan 20.

STR is paid to low- and middle-income Malaysian households, single adults and senior citizens who meet the government's income and eligibility criteria.

He said the assistance is channelled through a cashless mechanism, adding that the government would monitor the effectiveness of the programmes to ensure aid reached the intended recipients.

Anwar said the Rahmah assis-

tance programmes had recorded a 96 per cent utilisation rate, adding that RM150 million in unspent Sara funds had been identified.

He said the unutilised funds would be reallocated to vulnerable groups, such as residents of shelters for domestic violence victims, students with disabilities and special needs, and medical assistance for poor patients, with RM15 million allocated for student food assistance.

"The funds that were not spent will be redistributed to those who need them most," he said.

The government, he said, remains committed to timely delivery of assistance through improved digital systems and coordination across agencies.

The Federation of Malaysian Consumer Associations (Fomca) welcomed the government's latest cost-of-living assistance under the Rahmah umbrella.

Fomca chief executive officer Dr T. Saravanan said the measures provided relief to households grappling with rising food prices and daily expenses.

He said the direct cash assistance had helped to ease immediate financial pressure on families and ensured basic needs, such as food and household necessities, could be met.

"Many households are facing significant strain from the higher living costs. Direct assistance plays an important role in reducing short-term financial stress and protecting consumers' access to essentials," he told the *New Straits Times*.

Saravanan said the assistance would also have a positive spillover effect on the economy.

He said spent aid stimulated domestic consumption and supported small retailers, traditional shops and local suppliers.

"This helps sustain businesses

and employment within local communities.

"Social assistance, therefore, does not only protect consumers but also strengthens local economic activity," he added.

However, Saravanan said there was room for improvement in the design of the programmes.

He said the current mechanisms did not allow beneficiaries to use the funds at wet markets, limiting its effectiveness.

"Wet markets remain a key source of affordable and fresh food, such as vegetables, fish, chicken and meat, for many households, especially those in urban low-income and rural communities," he said.

Allowing assistance to be used at wet markets would better reflect consumer spending patterns and dietary needs, while supporting small traders and hawkers who relied on daily purchases, he added.