

**Sabah's Rural Development Is Always Government's Priority – Najib
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KOTA KINABALU, Nov 1 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak today gave his assurance to continue ensuring that rural development, specifically in Sabah, be given high priority to ensure the people in the state were not marginalised from national development.

Najib, who is also Barisan Nasional (BN) chairman, said the people in the rural areas were the backbone and strength of BN, and who had given their full trust in BN to continue helming the government until today.

In this regard, Najib said it was the duty of BN to ensure the people in the rural areas received full attention so that their welfare and wellbeing continued to be cared for.

"For that reason, in the 2016 Budget which I tabled recently, I stressed and prioritised rural development (including in Sabah)," he said in his speech when opening the Triennial Conference of Parti Bersatu Rakyat Sabah (PBRs), here, today.

Najib said, the 2016 Budget, which contained 130 touch points, among others, outlined provisions for rural development including a RM1.4 billion allocation to upgrade 700 kilometres of road nationwide, RM878 million for electricity supply projects involving 10,000 houses and RM568 million for piped water supply projects.

In Sabah, Najib said, among those being focused on was the construction of first one of the Pan Borneo Highway from Sindumin to Tawau, a distance of 706 kilometres, at an estimated cost of RM12.8 billion, and upon completion, the highway would operate without any toll charge.

He said the construction of Pan Borneo would open a new chapter for Sabah and allow the opening of new areas in the state via a network of roads which could connect one place to another.

Other than the Pan Borneo Highway, the 2016 Budget has also stressed on other needs in Sabah and Sarawak including economy-class domestic air transportation for the Rural Air Services routes being exempted from the Goods and Services Tax, 1Malaysia Mobile Clinic Service in the interior and uniformity in the prices of goods.

According to Najib, the people of Sabah had made the right decision in opting to together form Malaysia and in picking BN to head the national leadership.

He was also satisfied with the cooperation given by the Sabah state government under the leadership of Chief Minister Datuk Seri Musa Aman and would continue to strive to meet the needs of the state so as to bring comfort to its people.

On another development, Najib said the 1Malaysia People's Aid (BR1M) which was given to the moderate and low-income groups was proof of the government's concern for the welfare of these groups and was confident the people would spend the aid in the best possible manner.

As such, he said, it was not apt if there were quarters who questioned and regarded the giving of BR1M as unnecessary because Singapore, which was categorised as a developed economy, also implemented the same approach, despite differing in method.

"When we give BR1M to the people, the people benefit. (We) must also have confidence in allowing the people to spend for their own wellbeing and the recipients of BR1M to spend it prudently," he said.

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