

**PM says as “Apai Besar” wants Sarawak to be on Par with Peninsula
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BETONG, April 17 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak on Sunday said that as Malaysia's 'Apai besar' (number one leader), his main agenda now was to see Sarawak to be on par with the peninsula.

"As Apai besar of Malaysia, there's one thing I have not yet managed to deliver, that is to position Sarawak in terms of its development and income-level to be on par with the peninsula. I consider this my main agenda," he said.

Najib, who is on his 50th working visit to Sarawak since assuming office as prime minister six years ago, said development, should be centred on social justice, taking into account balanced development between the urban and rural areas.

"Development should not be concentrated in city areas, but should also extend to and include the rural areas. As a caring government, we are indebted to the rural community that has always been a staunch supporter of the BN (Barisan Nasional) government.

"Therefore) it is worth it for the BN government to spend on development in the rural areas," he said when opening the Betong Rural Transformation Centre (RTC) in Mid-Layar near here.

Also present were Sarawak Deputy Chief Minister Tan Sri Alfred Jabu, Minister of Rural and Regional Development Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob, and Minister of Plantation Industries and Commodities Datuk Amar Douglas Uggah Embas.

Najib said close ties between the federal and Sarawak governments had managed to spur development in the state.

He cited the establishment of the Rural Transformation Centre (RTC) in Betong as evidence of close cooperation that benefited all parties.

He said through the RTC initiative, various ministries, departments and agencies from both the federal and state governments would be accessible under one roof, offering a variety of services to local residents, and it would also lead to more development in the area.

"If the state and federal governments are in one family (Barisan Nasional) there are so many possibilities that we previously could not even imagine, but can now be

implemented. Our (federal and state government) journey has come very far," he said.

Meanwhile, Ismail Sabri said RTC Betong which is located next to the Pan Borneo Highway, will provide convenience to road users as well as benefit the local population, in line with the government's desire to develop the rural areas.

"The RTC will transform the rural areas, so that it can attract private investment, provide job opportunities and economic activity, as well as encourage the younger generation to continue to live in and develop these rural areas," he said.

Ismail Sabri said so far, the Ministry of Rural and Regional Development had managed to set up nine RTCs across the country, namely RTC Perak, RTC Kelantan, RTC Pahang, RTC Johor, RTC Kedah, RTC Terengganu, RTC Melaka, and two RTCs in Sarawak.

"Two more RTCs, in Negeri Sembilan and Penang, are being set up and are expected to be fully operational by the middle of this year.

"My ministry is also identifying potential new locations in Sabah and Selangor to set up RTCs," he said.

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