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Turning more rural folk into entrepreneurs



PETALING JAYA: As the government continues to restructure and diversify the economy to help Malaysians improve their lives, topmost on the agenda is continuing to empower rural communities in the country to embark on entrepreneurship.

Caretaker Prime Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob said the government is committed to developing such areas through rural economics and entrepreneurship, especially when the infrastructure is already in place.

The effort is in line with the Rural Development Policy, which comprises three main principles – being sustainable, inclusive and holistic – in achieving better success in developing rural areas by 2030.

The government's main aim is to empower the rural population to diversify economic opportunities for them, instead of focusing on traditional activities such as farming, fishing and rubber tapping so that they can eventually divert towards entrepreneurship.

Caretaker Rural Development Minister Datuk Seri Mahdzir Khalid said the budget allocation and prioritisation given to the development of rural areas and populations would help in infrastructure development and stimulate growth in human capital and the economy.

Mahdzir said about RM20 million was dedicated to setting up a programme for those interested in entrepreneurship.

The programme would also see collaborations with other agencies such as Majlis Amanah Rakyat, Felcra and Risda to empower more people to venture into rural entrepreneurship.

The Budget 2023 breakdown indicates prioritisation on improving basic infrastructure in rural areas in order to enhance the population's quality of life.

"I believe that the infrastructure in rural areas is of utmost importance and we are working towards building better infrastructure for the people, such as roads, street lights, community halls and mosques," he said.

Felda Youth Council president Muhammad Fadzli Hassan said he was happy with the priority set by the caretaker prime minister to focus on rural economic development and expressed gratitude for the government's continuous effort to improve the lives of the rural community.

"As someone from Felda, which is also a rural area, I always welcome efforts or initiatives to improve work opportunities to prevent more people from migrating to big cities. We need more people here.

"I am so glad that the prime minister has taken affirmative actions to provide more options and improve our lives in these areas, especially industrial development within rural areas, which will allow more job opportunities to bloom and stimulate economic development," he said.

Muhammad Fadzli added that the government's effort to empower rural entrepreneurship is relevant to other efforts, such as providing housing opportunities for rural communities, including Felda's generational housing scheme, which would prevent people from moving out of the settlement.

"Everything we hoped for has become a reality and we hope more people will participate in the initiatives that the government has established to make use of the resources in rural areas and venture into the digital economy to allow us to cross the border without going anywhere by using e-commerce platforms," he said.

Malaysian Institute of Economic Research senior research fellow Dr Shankaran Nambiar described Ismail Sabri's move to strengthen rural communities as good.

He added that agriculture needs to be reprioritised and that the government's move to enhance agricultural development is on the right path.

"However, it has to be technology-driven and knowledge-intensive," he said.

Nambiar added that entrepreneurially rich rural communities have to be nurtured.

He said as a first step, entrepreneurs should be guided before selecting and developing areas they intend to pursue.