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PUTRAJAYA: Some 20,000 people have signed up for the government's People's Income Initiative (PII), which aims to upskill them into small-scale entrepreneurs, just a week after its introduction.

Economy Minister Rafizi Ramli said 22,319 people had signed up for the programme since Feb 26.

He said more focus would be given to the poorest districts in the country since the programme aims to increase income opportunities for the hardcore poor.

The government is targeting

100,000 participants in the first year.

PII was announced under Budget 2023 and aims to help participants generate an income of at least RM2,000 a month.

Rafizi said 52% of the registrations were for the Food Entrepreneur Initiative (Insan), 29% were for the Agro Entrepreneur Initiative (Intan) and 19% were for the Services Operator Initiative.

He said 376 off-takers, including companies, had also shown an interest in installing vending machines at their premises and buying the products churned out of the programme.

Selangor, Johor and Perak were

the states that recorded the highest participation rates, he added.

Rafizi said more emphasis would also be placed on increasing participation from the low-income states of Kelantan, Terengganu, Perlis, Sabah and Sarawak.

He said he had expected participation in states with the highest poverty rates to be slower, but that his ministry would call the state leadership, elected representatives, including the Opposition, and the relevant agencies from the poorest districts to roll out these initiatives.

These poorest districts include Tongod, Pitas, Kota Marudu, Beluran, Kudat, Telupid, Pusa, Nabawan, Kota Belud, Jeli, Kinabatangan, Kuala

Krai, Gua Musang, Bachok, Pasir Mas, Tumpat, Besut, Marang, Hulu Terengganu, Terengganu, Machang and Dungun.

Rafizi said he hoped the initiative would not be politicised.

He said the site for the Intan initiative was expected to be launched in the first week of April.

He added that his ministry was discussing with the relevant agencies how to expedite site approvals for the programme's first round, which involves 20 participants.

He said the first batch would involve around 4ha of land in Putrajaya, near the ministry.

Under the Intan initiative, the government will open up 323.7ha of

Federal Government land to agricultural activities and focus on crops with a high volume of trade and demand.

"Intan has considered the cost of the site, infrastructure and operations, including fertiliser and electricity, so that 100% of the gain from sales can go to the participants," he told a press conference on the Jan 2023 Consumer Price Index (CPI), where the CPI fell to 3.7% in January 2023 from 3.8% in December 2022.

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