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Modernising agriculture in Selangor



SHAH ALAM, June 6 — The Selangor Agro Icon is on the cards as the state government plans to empower farmers to become trainers in the agriculture industry to increase and improve crop production and yield, says Izhah Hashim.

The State Public Amenities, Agricultural Modernisation and Agro-based Industry Committee chairman said the initiative aims to train modern farmers and equip them with the latest technology and farming knowledge.

"The objective of the programme is to identify 10 farmers who are into modern farming in Selangor and turn them into teachers or mentors to encourage more young participants in the agriculture sector.

"The Selangor Agor Icon is open to farmers eligible under the regulations set by the agriculture committee. Farmers practising modern farming and proven to be successful would be selected as an icon.

"The state government will audit and assist them in the form of financial schemes and they will mentor other farmers. We will choose the icons from various categories which include crop cultivation, livestock production and fish farming," he told *Selangor Journal* in a recent exclusive interview.

The programme, which comes under the Selangor Agro Transformation Plan (PeTA), will be launched soon in collaboration with the Selangor Agro TV.

"The plan is part of state government's effort to achieve the Smart Selangor 2025 goals," he said.

Izhah also revealed that the state administration is in the final stage to set up a centre of excellence (COE) for agriculture to spur farm produce in the state.

"This is to help farmers in gathering skills and Research and Developments (R&D) in agriculture that would be expanded state-wide.

"The COE will be tasked to get inputs from the Malaysian Agricultural Research and Development Institute (Mardi) and public universities to enable farmers to upgrade and modernise their farms. At the moment, we are the midst of deciding on whether to establish the COE under my committee or we let it operate as a government-linked company," he said.

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Tough recovery journey ahead – Sabah Employers

KOTA KINABALU: Sabah Employers Association welcomes the Economic Recovery Plan (Penjana) announced by Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin on Friday.

This follow-up to the Economic Stimulus Package (Prihatin) marks the stage of recovery for the nation, in the fight against Covid-19 and the calamity caused by it.

"The revelation that to date Prihatin's multi-pronged budget has preserved 12.7 million jobs are commendable. Despite its direct liquidity injection to encourage domestic consumption within the economy, the 2.8 percent Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth or RM40 billion result achieved from pumping in RM260 billion belies however the arduous challenges existing within a stunted market, and the huge momentum required to kick-start it.

"SEA believes that there are three critical assistance packages for businesses to rely on to survive, and "recover": Wage subsidy, SME financing, and Loan moratoriums.

"Penjana package has extended the Wage Subsidy Program by a further three months, together



Yap

with Hiring Training, Re-skill Up-skill programmes, which will assist job preservations further.

"The RM2 billion SME Financing will be futile, as it only serves 4,000 SMEs with RM500,000 cap each, and made worse by banks' cherry picking behaviors. Bank Negara should not allow banks to disburse, but rather through government agencies with quota allocated by state, to ensure fair coverage for SMEs throughout the country.

"Glaringly missing are the loan moratoriums, which should

be extended to December 2020. Many businesses are still finding hard to stand on own feet, and will be severely hit with the looming pressure to pay on 1st October. By even halving the loan repayments from 1st October to end December 2020 will certainly enable more breathing space to recover sustainably.

"The effectiveness of Penjana can only achieve so much for the state of Sabah. With slowest growth rate of 1.5% amongst all states, and second highest unemployment rate of 5.8% in 2018, Sabah is not resilient against any economic shocks, especially one with a magnitude as large as Covid-19.

"Sabah is different than other states, with upstream and downstream commodity economy and tourism services. It is more labour intensive, less technology driven, and mostly service driven.

"The state's three economic engines - O&G, plantation and tourism have been impacted perversely, taking out large chunk of GDP and jobs during the last two months. SEA sees that the state government has hitherto not been clear with defined stages of strategization; like the six stages

of Resolve - Resilience - Restart - Recovery - Revitalize - Reform as communicated by Federal government.

"Such lack of planning will see fire-fighting approaches being undertaken on sporadic manner. The state's Ministry of Trade and Industry, and Ministry of Agriculture & Food Industry have been notably working relentlessly during this testing period to assist the state's SMEs, yet seemingly working in isolated manners.

"Sectors that can be activated on higher gears to assist economic recovery are timber upstream, construction, and distributive trade with a uniquely captured export markets of ZamBaSuTa (Zamboanga - Basilan - Sulu - Tawi Tawi), and Kalimantan," said SEA president, Yap Cheen Boon said in a statement issued yesterday. Yap said recent public reflections by state minister on palm oil's sales tax, political debate on illegal measure for examples were not the right step forward.

He pointed out the state government needs to be forthcoming with its socio-economic plan for Sabah's revival from now, till December 2020, and beyond.