

Empower support system for elders' well-being

KUALA LUMPUR – “Warga tua teras masyarakat, hidup lama penuh jasa setia, pada negara, didik anak dan cucu, Ke arah matlamat kita”.

“Lama sudah kau hidup teruji, penuh ranjau dan rintangan, untuk kemerdekaan, kitalah pewarisnya, di dalam negara bertuah.”

(Senior citizens are the pillars of society. They have spent their lives contributing to our families, our communities and our country. Today's generation can live happily and peacefully as a result of the struggles of past leaders and the people in fighting for independence).

The verses of this Malay song titled ‘Warga Tua Teras Masyarakat’ (Senior Citizens the Pillars of Society) would certainly ring a bell for the 90's generation.

While it has been ages since the song is aired on the radio or television, the message that it is driving home is clear: the country's foundation is the result of the struggles and sacrifices of our senior citizens and they deserve all our gratitude.

Gems of the nation

The National Senior Citizens Day is annually observed on Oct 1 with this year's celebration themed ‘Resilience and Contributions of Women Senior Citizens’.

Besides celebrating the day in appreciation of senior citizens who are gems of the nation, the support system for the vulnerable group's well-being should be empowered to ensure their welfare is taken care of as Malaysia heads towards an ageing society by 2030.

According to the Director General of the Social Welfare Department (JKM) Datuk Shaharuddin Abu Sohoh, the agency has prepared various initiatives to provide for elderly care especially the displaced groups who are in dire need of support and assistance.

JKM's initiative is embraced the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development (KPWKM) by providing support, social and welfare services for senior citizens such as financial aid, care institutions and the K4K (community for community) social support programme.

“For the financial aid programme, as of August 2022, KPWKM through JKM has disbursed the Senior Citizens Assistance to 138,629 senior citizens with a financial allocation of RM555,190,137.

“This assistance is given to elders aged 60 and above who do not have any source of livelihood and that their own family do not have the means to support them.

“This assistance is also to encourage the elder folks to stay involved in the community,” he said in his speech in conjunction with the National Senior Citizens Day at the JKM headquarters in Putrajaya recently.

Developing elders' potential

There are two institutions for elder care namely Rumah Seri Kenangan (RSK) for hardcore poor senior citizens who are in need of care and protection, while Rumah Ehsan (RE) is designated for sick and ailing elders for their care, treatment and protection.

Shaharuddin said the K4K social support programme involves the Senior Citizens Activity Centre (PAWE), the Senior Citizen Care Units (UPWE) and Home Help Services.

“Perhaps not many are aware of the existence of PAWE, which is a strategic collaboration between KPWK and other government agencies as well as other non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to enable senior citizens to continue enjoying quality life in their golden years.

“The PAWE programme focuses on developing the senior citizens’ existing potential in terms of their capabilities especially those who are still healthy and energetic and who can still contribute their services and expertise to the local community,” he said adding that to date 153 PAWE (covering 140 parliamentary constituencies) are operational and active with 50,929 registered senior citizens.

Meanwhile, UPWE refers to transport services provided for senior citizens to go for their medical check-ups and treatment at hospitals as well as clinics.

As of 2017, nine UPWE vehicles were run by NGOs for the purpose.

He said many people may not be aware of the existence of the Home Help Services managed by volunteers, adding that services provided for included house cleaning, accompanying senior citizens to buy groceries, pay utility bills, taking them to the hospital and provides personal care for them.

“As of July 31, a total of 3,178 volunteers have cumulatively provided assistance through the services to 9,931 senior citizens,” he added.

Ageing nation 2030

Finance Minister Tengku Datuk Seri Zafrul Tengku Abdul Aziz in unveiling the Budget 2023 on Oct 7 said, the agenda to empower senior citizens will continue to be stepped up, adding that more than RM1 billion have been allocated for the group next year.

This, he added, was a significant increase from over RM580 million in 2020 following an increase in the rate of assistance for senior citizens and widening the eligibility of recipients.

Tengku Zafrul said the government would continue to provide a RM21 million grant to support the operation of private care institutions for senior citizens, children and people with disabilities run by NGOs.

Shaharuddin said the ageing scenario is one of the aspects that is being addressed by the government as the nation heads toward an ageing status with senior citizens contributing 15 per cent of the population, noting that it is also JKM’s aspiration to see the older generation lead a healthy life, financially adequate, calm and protected.

“What is achieved today – social well-being and development – is the result of the hard work of our past generations. The people should understand their role and be prepared from now for their older days,” he added.

According to the latest data from the **Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM)**, life expectancy at birth in 2021 has increased by nearly 12 years to 75.6 years compared to five decades ago as life expectancy then (1970) was 63.6 years.

Chief Statistician Datuk Seri Dr Mohd Uzir Mahidin said the continuous rise in life expectancy indicated that Malaysia would experience an ageing population by 2030 and by that time, the percentage of people aged 60 years and over will reach 15.3 per cent of the total population.

The department also said that the population of those aged 60 and above showed a yearly increase, that is increasing from 3.5 million (10.7 per cent) in 2021 to 3.6 million (11.1 per cent) this year out of the total population of 32.7 million.

In this respect, Shaharuddin said the formulation of the Senior Citizens Policy is a manifestation of the government's commitment to the group as the nation prepares for the challenges of an ageing society from now and the future.

"It is also to ensure that senior citizens continue to lead an active life and with dignity and contribute to the community and the nation inclusively.

"Towards this end, the National Action Plan for Senior Citizens has been formulated as a roadmap for multi-sectoral cooperation in improving the delivery system for the interest and well-being of the older generation," he added.

He also said that the well-being of senior citizens within the context of the National Senior Citizens Policy encompasses five key dimensions namely health (healthy ageing), social (active ageing), economic (productive ageing), spiritual (positive ageing) and environment (supportive ageing).

Based on the findings of a Report on Senior Citizens' Requirements of Facilities and Services by 2030 released by the Malaysian Research Institute on Ageing, Universiti Putra Malaysia, there are four categories of senior citizens, namely incapable and are not financially-able; incapable and financially-able; capable and not financially-able as well as able and financially-able.

According to the study, respondents are in the poor category (not financially-able) (2.3 per cent), respondents in the poor category but capable (second category) (21.4 per cent), respondents in the poor but healthy group (third category) (eight per cent) and the rest are from the health and financially-able category representing the largest group of respondents.

Against this backdrop, Shaharuddin said KPWKM is currently undertaking various initiatives including formulating the Senior Citizens draft Bill, improving the existing Long Term Care as well as collaborating with the Economic Planning Unit and the United Nations Development Programme to undertake a pioneer project on the age-friendly town of Taiping, Perak.

Prepared for old age

Various programmes are in the pipeline to instil awareness and knowledge not only among the senior citizens but also at different age levels.

Among others are the introduction of an intergenerational programme for Senior Citizens, children and youths, which is seen as an effective medium to create awareness among youths and the elder generation on the importance of undertaking activities and community services jointly.

Shaharuddin said to date for the year 2022 alone, 20 intergenerational programmes for productive senior citizens have been planned and implemented by bringing together senior citizens, children as well as youths to engage in joint activities.

Those implemented include the Intergenerational Capacity and Community Solidarity Programme (PIIKAT) carried out in five states namely Johor, Kedah, Kelantan, Perak and Sabah.

A seminar on Intergenerational Mindset (CMI) was also held in 15 states among others Selangor, Terengganu, Perlis and Sabah, he added. – Bernama

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