



## Malay-Muslim company meets food crisis challenge head on

PETALING JAYA: For a country with almost a million hectares of arable land, Malaysia struggles to feed its people.

Nearly 60% of the food consumed here – from meat to greens and grain – is either raised or cultivated in another country. The food import bill in 2020 amounted to a staggering RM55.5 billion.

Most of the fodder for the little livestock raised in Malaysia is also imported. In 2020, the country spent RM4.6 billion to buy animal feed, comprising mostly wheat, oatmeal, barley, cereals and corn, from abroad.

For Global Ikhwan Services and Business Holdings Sdn Bhd (GISBH), this crisis is also a business opportunity.

The Malay-Muslim company wants to play a role in helping the country overcome the food shortage problem and is doing so by taking part in programmes and initiatives introduced by the government.

For instance, it is already taking part in a padi cultivation project in Rompin, Negri Sembilan.

The project, under the auspices of the Integrated Agriculture Development Authority, entails the cultivation of padi over 11,000ha in Rompin as well as in the Pekan district in Pahang.

The company also cultivates fresh produce such as bean sprouts that it supplies directly to the markets, CEO Lokman Hakim Pfordten told FMT Business.

Malaysia's self sufficiency ratio (SSR) in rice and vegetables is at only 63% and 44.4% respectively, making efforts by GISBH significant.

Solving the food problem has become a priority for GISBH. "When it comes to food security, we have to take the responsibility. Blaming others won't solve the problem," Lokman said.

"To achieve that, the government and the rakyat must be on the same page with regards to reducing our dependence on imported products.

"We have to make the effort to raise local production, especially of basic necessities and food."

Data from the **department of statistics Malaysia** shows that 77.8% of beef and 90.4% of mutton consumed in the country is imported. The annual import bill for beef is RM2.2 billion while that for mutton is RM879.4 million.

Lokman said GISBH is also constantly on the lookout for suitable land for cultivation.

"The price of imported corn is rising. As a result, chicken has become more costly. To help the farmers reduce production costs, we are cultivating corn to be processed into chicken feed," he said.

Nothing is wasted. He said the corn leaves and stalks would then be processed into cattle and goat feed.

To help farmers reduce production costs, GISBH has started a project to develop its own chicken and fish bran. "It's still on a small scale, but the results have been satisfactory," he said.

GISBH is also venturing into deep-sea fishing in its effort to help boost the supply of seafood in Malaysia.

To this end, it has purchased a C2-class boat and several smaller boats for fishing activities in the waters off Sabah.

"We are also targeting to have up to 10 large-scale deep-sea fishing boats equipped with storage and canning facilities," Lokman said.

While prices of food continue to rise, Lokman said, GISBH will ensure that items sold at its eateries and bakeries are competitively priced.

Apart from its efforts to solve the food crisis, GISBH is engaged in community service programmes such as the Dapur Prihatin Bersama and Jumaat Berkah.

Through these programmes, the company distributes food from its chain of restaurants to the needy.

"We are ready to work hand-in-hand with the government and the community to introduce projects in sectors such as food and beverage, agriculture, livestock and fishing to meet the needs of the people and the nation," Lokman added.

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