

KUALA LUMPUR: A grassroots movement has urged the government to introduce a law aimed at arresting the alleged growth of poverty in Malaysia.

Addressing a forum here, Saya Anak Bangsa Malaysia (SABM) co-founder Haris Ibrahim recalled an attempt in 2014 to introduce such a bill in the Dewan Rakyat and lamented that the speaker shot it down.

He was referring to the Social Inclusion Bill. The bill was proposed by SABM and National Human Rights Society (Hakam) and former Sungai Siput MP Michael Jeyakumar had tried to table it on behalf of the two movements as a Private Member's Bill in 2014.

The bill envisaged the establishment of an independent commission that would work with MPs and state assemblymen to look for solutions to poverty issues in their constituencies

Haris noted a claim made by the previous government that there was no poverty in Kuala Lumpur, but he pointed out that the United Nations Development Fund had reported that lack of nutrition had stunted the growth of 22% of children in low-cost flats in the city.

He also spoke of poverty in oil-rich Terengganu and highlighted a report about poverty in Sarawak, noting that some families in Batang Air, for example, were said to be earning only RM5 a day.

He disclosed that his group had met with representatives from DAP, PKR, Amanah, Parti Sosialis Malaysia and some East Malaysian parties and said they were supportive of the Social Inclusion Bill.


Malik Imtiaz Salwar.

Human rights lawyer Malik Imtiaz Salwar also spoke at the forum. He acknowledged that the previous government did launch several poverty eradication programmes but alleged that they were oriented towards gaining political support.

He urged the current government to take over Jeyakumar’s bill and also to educate the public against being manipulated by vote-seeking politicians.

Jayanath Appudurai, another SABM founder, said the government's definition of the poverty line – a monthly income of RM980 for a family of four – was unrealistic.

He noted that according to a World Bank recommendation, the line should be at RM2,770.

He also pointed out that the relative poverty line income for Malaysia should be 60% of the median monthly household income, or equivalent to RM 3,150.00

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