

Safeguard senior citizens' welfare, rights

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LETTERS: Malaysia is considered as an ageing nation and the government should address this fast.

By 2030, Malaysians aged 60 and above will make up 15 per cent of the population.

The Department of Statistics Malaysia stated that Perak had the highest population above 65 in 2020 at 8.9 per cent, Kedah and Perlis at 7.9 per cent and Sarawak 7.5 at per cent.

This was followed by Selangor at 6.9 per cent, Negri Sembilan (6.8 per cent), Penang and Kuala Lumpur (6.6 per cent), Kelantan (6.4 per cent), Melaka and Pahang (6.3 per cent) and Johor (6.1 per cent).

Alarmingly, the states with the greatest leap in population age from 2010 to 2020 were Sabah (115.4 per cent) Putrajaya (100 per cent), Selangor (97 per cent) and Labuan (75 per cent).

To make matters worse, the fertility rate dropped to 1.7 per cent in 2020 compared with 2.1 per cent in 2010.

Where do we stand in terms of critical social and economic wellbeing opportunities and guarantees?

Until now, nothing concrete has been achieved in terms of social and economic wellbeing for our ageing or aged group.

It was disappointing when the new cabinet announced that there were no special provisions for the welfare of senior citizens.

This, after sporadic national policy studies or papers were conducted as early as 2007 and 2015, including one from the Malaysian Research Institute on Ageing in 2016.

In 2019, Universiti Malaya was appointed to conduct a 15-month study that would eventually materialise into a bill to safeguard the rights of the elderly, akin to the Child Act 2001 and Domestic Violence Act 1994. What happened to the study?

The study aimed to study the scope, content and approach of a specific law for senior citizens. If passed, the proposed act was meant to empower the elderly and aid in promoting a healthy and active ageing process among Malaysia's elderly.

Thus far, what can be gleaned from the MyGovernment website is the Shared Prosperity Vision 2030 heading under the superfluous-sounding last chapter: Polarity Management.

There is a two-paragraph description under the subheading "Senior citizens" that says, "...should entail the provision of space to ensure their wellbeing" and "the welfare accessibility to the use of facilities for senior citizens is primarily on health and social care" and the "government needs to set specific policies to ensure that the elderly have sufficient savings to sustain themselves in old age".

What those specific policies would be is anyone's guess.

In the case of the Welfare Department's portal under the Women, Family, and Community Development Ministry, it is no better. It generically states; "The objectives of the National Policy for Older Persons are to provide efficient and

effective services for individuals, families and society to ensure a conducive environment for older persons."

And that the "implementation of the National Policy for Older Persons and Plan of Action for Older Persons" is a fixed agenda item in the National Advisory and Consultative Council for Older Persons Meeting.

Nothing constructive is mentioned in terms of specific strategies, apart from the fact that the National Day of Older Persons is celebrated on Oct 1 every year.

For a country to progress on all fronts in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 2030, senior citizens' welfare and rights need to be accounted for.

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