

13MP marks **historic pivot** towards ageing nation

► Plan prioritises long-term care, retirement reform and social protection as central pillars of inclusive development: Academic

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PETALING JAYA: The 13th Malaysia Plan is a watershed moment in the nation's response to an ageing population, laying the groundwork for sweeping reforms in long-term care, retirement and social protection systems.

The plan reflects an urgent recalibration of policy direction as the country braces to become an aged nation by 2043, according to Universiti Putra Malaysia's Malaysian Research Institute on Ageing.

Its director Assoc Prof Dr Rahimah Ibrahim described the 13MP as a "major step forward" in preparing for the demographic shift.

"The plan is significant in terms of the government's commitment to long-term care (LTC) and social protection reforms in preparation for aged nation status.

"No change happens overnight, but these are bold steps in the right direction."

For the first time, a national development plan has explicitly prioritised long-term care as a strategic policy issue.

"Under the plan, a dedicated entity will be established to coordinate a comprehensive care ecosystem that includes eldercare, childcare, disability care and faith-based residential institutions."

Rahimah said Malaysia's long-term care sector is still in its infancy and is in urgent need of regulation, sustainable funding and professionalised staffing.

"It is an emerging industry that needs structure. Right now we lack standardisation, adequate manpower and regulatory oversight."

She stressed that long-term care should not be conflated with clinical healthcare.

While hospitals and clinics focus on medical treatment, LTC encompasses personal, social and functional support to help individuals maintain dignity and independence in their daily lives.

Rahimah also welcomed the inclusion of the National Ageing Blueprint 2025-2045, calling it a "critical strategic document" that must be finalised, presented and made publicly accessible to guide implementation efforts.

On the proposed review of the mandatory



The Madani government envisions a future in which senior adults remain active contributors in dynamic, multi-generational workspaces. — **AI GENERATED PIC BY AZURA ABAS/THESUN**

retirement age, she voiced support but urged a phased and pragmatic rollout.

"The government should start with expanding re-employment schemes, while gradually phasing in any extension of the retirement age across both public and private sectors.

"While the retirement age was raised to 60 in 2012, labour force participation among those aged 55-59 did not increase significantly.

"However, it did reverse the downward trend, which is encouraging."

She also commended the plan's emphasis on older adults' economic participation, particularly through flexible work arrangements and lifelong learning initiatives via Technical and Vocational Education and Training.

However, Rahimah acknowledged that enticing younger Malaysians into the aged care sector remains a challenge.

"Will youths be drawn to the care industry? Maybe yes - if there are clear wages, defined career pathways and if they find satisfaction in the work.

"Like the childcare industry before it, aged care can evolve into a respected profession."

At present, she said Malaysia's aged care landscape remains largely informal and under-regulated.

"Anyone can become an aged care worker. But without proper registration or certification, the workers are easily replaced.

"The sector also suffers from high turnover and chronic manpower shortages."

Rahimah also expressed support for the proposed hybrid Employees Provident Fund payout model - combining lump sum withdrawals with monthly disbursements - as a step towards a stronger social safety net.

While underlying inequalities in the pension system persist, she said the new model was "a bold step" towards enhancing income security for the ageing population.

"There's a lot to unpack in the 13MP. But what's clear is that the government is no longer treating ageing merely as a demographic trend - it's being seen as a transformative opportunity.

"We urge all stakeholders to view the shift as a challenge to reimagine Malaysia as a more inclusive, caring and sustainable society for all ages."