



Dr Ahmad Zahid – accompanied by Khairy, Malaysian Youth Council President Mua'mar Ghadafi Jamal Jamaluddin (right) and Deputy Youth and Sports Minister Datuk M. Saravanan (left) – launched the 46th National Youth Day at Universiti Putra Malaysia. — Photos: AZHAR MAHFOT/The Star



Food truck owners were invited to park at National Youth Day for free, as part of the Youth and Sports Ministry's efforts to promote youth entrepreneurship.

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THIS year's National Youth Day (NYD) celebration gave a glimpse into the future of Malaysian youth – one where they are empowered to achieve their full potential.

Held on May 15 at Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), the event was a whole lot of fun for the 10,000 people who showed up, including Youth and Sports Minister Khairy Jamaluddin and Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Ahmad Zahid Hamidi.

There were performances by Najwa Latif, OAG, Estranged and Monologue, as well as bazaars, food trucks and even creative workshops like Instagram photography and chalk art.

Fun times: checked. But it was more than just fun and games. The celebration, themed The Future Is Now, also brought hope to Malaysian youth with dreams of starting their own businesses.

During his speech at the NYD launch, Dr Ahmad Zahid called for a restoration of the youth entrepreneurship fund, saying he would propose that the government allocates at least RM500mil for it.

"We used to call them leaders of the future but that's no longer the case. They are the leaders of today," said Dr Ahmad Zahid to loud cheers from the crowd.

"Opportunities must be given to the youths to take up positions of leadership not only in politics, but as entrepreneurs as well."

Dr Ahmad Zahid also said RM10mil would be allocated for the Malaysian Youth Council over the next two years to fund youth activities.

"We know job opportunities are limited for school-leavers so we hope that this will

# Smells like youth spirit

Young Malaysian entrepreneurs have been given a huge boost after a major announcement at the 46th National Youth Day.

encourage the involvement of youths in entrepreneurship," he said.

Another important announcement made by the deputy prime minister was that the country's definition of "youth", which used to cover all Malaysians under 40, will be narrowed down to under 30 in 2018.

In line with its theme of supporting youth entrepreneurship, the NYD celebration had platforms for young business owners like Suzaidi Sunardi and his wife Nor Azzeul Shah, both 33.

Their food truck, DSFC On Wheels, was allowed to park at the event site, rent-free. They said other events usually charge up to RM200 per day.

Suzaidi said the RM500mil fund would be a great help for new entrepreneurs.

"When we started our company, we had a lot of problems with our finances. Most of our money goes into kitchen utensils and the truck," said Suzaidi, who has been in the food truck business since 2005.

Owners of Waff Wagon Trendy Food Truck, Ong Cheng Keat and Yong De Min, both 25, shared similar sentiments.

Ong felt that with the extra assistance, they'll be able to expand their business by getting another food truck and hiring a social media expert to handle the marketing of their business.

"We definitely need financial support because even if you have a great idea, with no money, it's hard to get it off the ground."

According to Khairy, the fund will likely be set up later this year after the mechanics and the ministry's role in it are finalised.

The loans will come from financial institutions such as Majlis Amanah Rakyat (MARA), TEKUN Nasional and SME Corp, but the Youth and Sports Ministry will help facilitate applications through its network with various youth groups.

"We have to foster an environment where young entrepreneurs can thrive, generate income and jobs, and contribute to the economy," said Khairy.

These young entrepreneurs will be part of the Small-Medium enterprises (SME) industry, which make up 65% of total employment and contribute 36% to the country's gross domestic product.

He added that despite the youth being creative and enterprising, the number of young entrepreneurs isn't rising fast enough.

"This is why we must empower organisations and relevant ministries in allowing for better access to entrepreneurship opportunities," he added.

Another cool thing that happened at the NYD celebration was the National Premier Youth Awards, which is given to young

Malaysians who have made special contributions to the country.

Among them was Hafizah Noor Isa, 29, a PhD researcher who was part of the team that made headlines around the world by proving the existence of gravitational waves, which in turn fulfilled the last prediction of Albert Einstein's general theory of relativity.

"I hope what little contribution I made to this significant finding can inspire many more young Malaysians, and open new horizons for a new generation of scientists to study the universe," she said.

The NYD celebration was the second stop of Rakan Muda's Jelajah Kampus, a supplementary programme to NYD that aims to give the youth a platform to showcase their talent and creativity.

"We're trying to reach out to university students by going to campuses," said Khairy, adding that he has received comments that youths wanted to be involved in their programmes but couldn't make it to Putrajaya, where NYD has been held over the past few years.

The first campus tour was held at Universiti Malaysia Sarawak on April 23. The roadshow will continue at four other locations – Taylor's University, Universiti Utara Malaysia, MMU Malacca and Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin.



Young people were also given a chance to showcase their creative talents through some workshops.



According to the Youth and Sports Ministry, a total of 10,000 youths participated in the programmes held that day.



Hafizah received an award for her contributions to proving the existence of gravitational waves.