

Abdul Rasheed Ghaffour: Welcoming address - Sasana Symposium 2024

Welcoming address by Mr Abdul Rasheed Ghaffour, Governor of the Central Bank of Malaysia (Bank Negara Malaysia), at the Sasana Symposium 2024, Kuala Lumpur, 12 June 2024.

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Welcome to Bank Negara Malaysia, and welcome to Sasana Symposium.

Last year's Symposium, our very first, underscored the urgency of structural reforms to build a stronger Malaysia. Building on that, the focus this year is on how we should advance these critical reforms – how we can make reforms a reality.

The case for reforms is very clear. Our economic environment is constantly changing, and as we spot risks and weaknesses, our policies must evolve to match. Reforms, from fiscal responsibility to improved social safety nets and enhanced climate resilience, are crucial to our country's sustainable growth, and to the welfare of the rakyat.

Drawing on lessons learnt over the years and emerging challenges, policymakers now have a clearer view of the path towards a more competitive and inclusive Malaysia. The current period of relative macroeconomic stability provides us with a unique window of opportunity to pursue meaningful reforms and build a brighter future. For instance, the shift from blanket subsidies, including for diesel, towards support that is better targeted to those in need should be welcomed as a positive step towards more equitable, sustainable policies while building fiscal policy space. We cannot, nor should we, assume that this window will not soon close upon us. We need to come together to make reforms a reality for Malaysia.

But as we implement the critical reforms needed, there are questions that we must address.

- First, how can we make the best of emerging global trends, harnessing them for the benefit of Malaysia?
- Second, how do we ensure that the necessary reforms yield sustainable, long-term gains while still addressing short-term issues? and;
- Third, how can we build and promote more sustainable, socially conscious and fair finance for households and businesses?

I am sure that these are the kind of questions that many of you here, both panellists and participants alike, have been confronted with and wish to have the answers to. While there are no easy answers, the conversations and dialogue over the next two days are intended to help us move forward. We aim to provide a platform where we can reason together on the issues and realities facing our economy, find common ground, challenge perceptions and through this process, strengthen our resolve to make

reforms a reality. The Symposium will discuss both immediate issues, such as strengthening external resilience, as well as long-term structural issues such as our labour market and the role of finance in our economy.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Sasana Symposium is more than just keynotes and in-depth, technical discussions. The Symposium is also about demonstrating how reforms and policy are more than just abstract concepts and ideas, about how reforms can make a positive impact in the lives of Malaysians.

For example, iTEKAD, a social finance programme which we launched at the height of the pandemic has been making inroads. We're happy to share today that over six thousand small and micro businesses have benefitted from iTEKAD, with them seeing almost a 90% increase in monthly sales and creating job opportunities in their communities. I would like to invite you to drop by the iTEKAD Marketplace – just outside our Museum and Art Gallery – to meet microentrepreneurs that have gained from the iTEKAD programme. iTEKAD is a human example of how the public and private sector can come together to make a meaningful, lasting impact in the lives and livelihoods of Malaysians.

Ladies and gentlemen,

To conclude, Sasana Symposium was originally conceived as a platform for discussing key issues and research of our flagship publications – the Annual Report, the Economic and Monetary Review and the Financial Stability Review. Our experience last year proved that this was an impactful occasion for us to engage the public in meaningful dialogue, and exchange perspectives on our work and thinking to promote monetary and financial stability for sustainable economic growth in Malaysia. My hope is that you will leave Sasana Symposium with a better appreciation of what we do, and your part in helping us secure a better future for all Malaysians.

Thank you.