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Kumaran-Estates

PAPER TO CABINET TO ENHANCE RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES

IPOH, Oct 19 (Bernama) -- The Rural Development Ministry will soon present a paper to the Cabinet on ways to enhance rural development programmes, particularly for those living in estates.

Deputy Minister Datuk K. Kumaran said today the paper, which was prepared six months ago, among others outlined the present living conditions in villages and estates.

"The proposals would allow ministry officials to help Indians living in the estates, now deemed as private property. This include taking over the estates' kindergartens," he told reporters after closing a seminar on the philosophy of rural development for 180 Indian leaders, here.

At present, some estates run their own kindergartens and hire their own teachers.

The proposals may also involve amendments to some existing laws when approved by the Cabinet, he added.

Kumaran said the paper was prepared following a directive by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad for better assistance to be rendered to those regarded by the government as poor (presently those earning RM425 or less a month) and the 36,000 people classified as hardcore poor (earning RM212.50 or less).

He said hardcore poverty could be eradicated but not poverty because the country's living standards were dynamic and always rising.

Kumaran said the ministry would also conduct a census on the urban poor early next year to enable the drawing up of better strategies and mechanisms to help them.

"The census will begin in the Klang Valley and then move on to other major towns like Ipoh, Pulau Pinang and Johor Bahru," he said.

He said the census was particularly significant because squatters comprised Malaysians of all races as well as foreign workers residing in the country.

Kumaran said the Education Ministry has a four-year plan to eventually take over the ministry's 7,000 pre-schools currently run by the ministry's Community Development Department (Kemas) beginning next year.

"By the end of the year 2000 or the beginning of 2001, Kemas will no longer recruit pre-school students aged six and will only pay attention to those aged between four and five years old," he added.

"The kindergarten problems in the estates will automatically be solved by then," he said.

He said the ministry would also propose that the rural industry programme be extended to other races besides Bumiputeras. -- BERNAMA

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