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Annuar-Poverty

M'SIA CONFIDENT OF ACHIEVING ZERO POVERTY BY 2000

WASHINGTON, Feb 4 (Bernama) -- Rural Development Minister Datuk Annuar Musa is confident that Malaysia will be among the few countries to realise the goal of reaching "zero poverty" by the year 2000, using microcredit as an effective weapon.

Microcredit or extension of tiny loans to the poor for small businesses could be used as an effective weapon to banish poverty, he told the Malaysian media, here, Monday.

Malaysia would soon launch the Institute for Rural Advancement to train practitioners and advocates in microcredit in the Asia Pacific, said Annuar, who represented the prime minister at the three-day first global Microcredit Summit, here, which ended Monday.

The summit, attended by first ladies and heads of state, government and non-governmental agencies, launched a nine-year campaign to help 100 million of the world's poorest families gain access to credit for small businesses by the year 2005.

Annuar said the government had allocated RM200 million for Amanah Ikhtiar Malaysia (AIM) to assist it in eliminating poverty through microcredit programmes.

He said AIM's role would be strengthened to allow the non-governmental agency to extend assistance to those living below the poverty line. Currently, it extends microcredit only to the hardcore poor.

He also said that Asean ministers of rural development would meet in Kuala Lumpur in July to discuss poverty eradication in the region.

AIM managing director Mukhtar Ramli said microcredit from AIM ranged from RM1,000 to RM10,000 and borrowers were charged a one-time processing fee of up to 14 per cent of the loan.

He said he was pleased that repayment was at 99.5 per cent. Out of RM112 million disbursed, only RM37,000 had not been paid up between 1986 and 1996.

Earlier, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, who led the Malaysian delegation to the summit, called on Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Queen Fabiola of Belgium.

She said Sheikh Hasina had officially invited her and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad to Bangladesh. A Bangladeshi minister will be sent to Kuala Lumpur soon to formally invite the prime minister.

Dr Siti Hasmah Ali, who left for home Monday, also attended the summit in her capacity as president of the International Steering Committee on Economic Advancement of Rural and Island Women (ISC), a group of 18 first ladies and wives of heads of governments.

She said the ISC, an advocacy group whose goal was to empower women, would hold its meeting in Kuala Lumpur next year to discuss microcredit programmes as a tool to raise the standard of living of women.

She was accompanied by National Unity and Social Development Minister Datin Paduka Zaleha Ismail. -- BERNAMA

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