

25/09/1997

Move to eradicate poverty in Asean

Ahmad Suffian

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - A multi-lateral framework for Asean countries is being devised to identify common areas for joint efforts to develop rural areas and eradicate poverty.

The move, by the Rural Development Ministry, will also facilitate the exchange of information and sharing of experiences of the Asean Ministers responsible for this task.

Minister Datuk Annuar Musa said there were many areas of possible co-operation between Asean Governments.

"The Ministry has taken this initiative to gather the relevant Asean ministers at a forthcoming forum to discuss rural development issues and identify common areas.

"Only relevant issues of mutual interest will be chosen for multi-level discussions," he said.

Annuar was speaking after conveying the Ministry's invitation to Asean ambassadors at a meeting here today.

The inaugural meeting of Asean Ministers of Rural Development and Poverty Eradication with the theme "Towards Asean Rural Advancement: Challenges In The Next Millennium" will be held at the Sunway Lagoon Resort Hotel on Oct 22 and 23.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will deliver the keynote address while each Asean minister will outline its Government's success in resolving their people's socio-economic issues.

It will be preceded by the First Asean Senior Officials Rural Development and Poverty Eradication Meeting from Oct 19 to 21.

Annuar said there had been little emphasis among Asean countries in collaborating to resolve rural development and poverty eradication issues.

He said this was despite realisation that there was disparity between the urban and rural sectors with a great majority of the region's population in the rural areas living in poverty.

"Unemployment, low productivity, illiteracy, inadequate economic opportunities as well as lack of basic infrastructure and social amenities is not uncommon in Asean countries," he said.

The Ministry's objective, said Annuar, was to encourage Asean Governments to be prepared to face future socio-economic challenges during the next millennium.

"A common problem afflicting rural development efforts in Asean countries is the lack of adequate and constant supplies of electricity and clean water.

"Through the multi-lateral discussions between Asean Ministers, we hope to devise a framework for future cooperation and find ways to resolve these basic problems effectively," he added.

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