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Plan to explain economic woes to rural people

Ravi Nambiar

BATU PAHAT, Tues. - The Rural Development Ministry will launch a programme to explain to rural folk the economic woes being faced by the country due to the decline in the ringgit and the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange.

Its minister Datuk Annuar Musa said the ministry would mobilise its community development division (Kemas) and village development and security committees (JKKKs) for this purpose.

He said the ministry would tell the rural people the reasons for the economic problems and what the Government was doing to ensure sustained growth and development.

"The foreign media has put the blame for the weakening ringgit on Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, saying his outspokenness is hurting the economy.

"They want Dr Mahathir to step down, saying it is the only way to save the country from economic chaos. These are lies being spread by the Western media.

"If it were true, Malaysia would not have enjoyed unprecedented levels of growth over the 16 years Dr Mahathir has led the country. It is, therefore, vital that the people rally around the Prime Minister and the Cabinet now as they seek to resolve the nation's economic woes.

"As the problem affects the whole population, rural people must also come out and declare their support for the Prime Minister," he said at the prize presentation ceremony for the national competition organised by his ministry for the best managed, cleanest and most beautiful village at Kampung Parit Tengah, Seri Merlong, near here today.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim was to have officiated at the function, but was held up on official business in Kuala Lumpur. Instead, the prizes were given away by Johor Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman.

Anwar, accompanied by his wife Datin Seri Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, however, arrived later to meet the villagers.

Earlier, Annuar devoted almost his entire speech on the economic problems, saying it was relevant because "what is the point of talking about rural development if our political leadership and economic strength are being wrecked by the foreign media and fund managers".

His defence of the Prime Minister and attacks on American financier George Soros and the foreign media drew repeated applause from the 3,000-odd farmers and smallholders.

Annuar said even though the "kampung people" might find it hard to understand the country's economic woes, this should not stop them from coming out in support of Dr Mahathir.

"I know it is a complex issue, but we cannot let foreigners destroy our economy and our leaders. This is why my ministry will direct Kemas and the JKKKs to go out and explain the problem to the people," he said.

He said the Government would not waver from its commitment to strive for continued progress in the kampungs.

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