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Talks under way for more Mara training centres

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - The Entrepreneur Development Ministry is holding discussions with the Economic Planning Unit in the Prime Minister's Department to increase the number of Mara Training Centres.

Its minister, Datuk Mustapa Mohamed, said today it was important to increase the number of centres as they were effective in curbing social ills and instilling discipline in those who had left school.

"We have not decided on the number of centres as it depends on government funding and our negotiations with the EPU," he told reporters after launching the Ivory Tower Village (Perkampungan Menara Gading) programme at the new main campus of the International Islamic University at Sungai Pusu, Gombak.

Currently, there are 120 such centres nationwide offering vocational training programmes such as electrical and mechanical engineering, furniture-making and welding.

Mustapa said the move would enable many more people who could not further their studies to learn useful skills.

"This is in line with current efforts to curb social ills."

He said the discipline of students in these centres had improved and they no longer came late, played truant or were involved in dadah-related problems.

He said the success of the programme was proven through the 50,000 people who had so far graduated from the centres.

"Most of them are employed in factories as technicians while others have decided to continue their studies. Some have also started their own businesses.

"These centres and the Institut Teknologi Mara will be the places for Bumiputera youths to gain useful skills which could enable them to become entrepreneurs later," he added.

On Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's call for a larger Bumiputera middle-class, Mustapa said it was his ministry's main function to create such a class.

He said Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim would hold a meeting with all relevant ministries, Menteri Besar and Chief Ministers to evaluate current programmes and to draw up new ones.

"My ministry will act as the secretariat in the effort to enlarge the Bumiputera middle-class."

Mustapa earlier commended UIA's efforts in organising the Ivory Tower Village programme which saw the participation of 400 pupils from all States who had just completed their Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia or Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia examinations.

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