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Poverty level in Malaysia set to rise, says Annuar

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MALAYSIA is expected to see a rise in its poverty level from 6.7 per cent last year to 8 per cent this year due to the current economic problem.

Rural Development Minister Datuk Annuar Musa said while the number of poor households is expected to increase by 22 per cent, he said the incidence of hardcore poverty is expected to rise from 1.2 per cent last year to 1.7 per cent this year.

"It is important for the Government to intensify effort to reduce the poverty level during the economic problem as the problem may lead to social and political unrest," he said when officiating the second meeting of the Asean senior officials on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication (SOMRDPE) in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

As such, all poverty-eradication programmes and village industry projects must be intensified to help rural folks overcome the effects of the economic problem.

When tabling the 1999 Budget at the Dewan Rakyat on October 23, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said rural development will be further enhanced through agricultural productivity programmes such as construction of agricultural infrastructure, introduction as well as the usage of new technology and training.

Apart from that, construction of rural roads, supply of electricity and water and redevelopment of traditional villages and growth centres are also being done.

An amount of RM1.124 billion is allocated to finance these programmes including RM138 million for Sabah and RM151 million for Sarawak.

The Government's effort to eradicate poverty will also be emphasised through its poverty eradication of the hardcore poor, enhancing village economic activities and the rehabilitation of dilapidated houses.

A sum of RM108 million is allocated under these programmes and 41,300 households are expected to benefit.

According to a 1998 report the United Nation Development Programme, almost 60 per cent of people in developing countries still do not have access to sanitation, one third have no safe water, one in four has no adequate housing or access to health services of any kind.

More than 17 million people die each year from curable infectious and parasitic diseases such as diarrhea, measles, malaria and tuberculosis.

Some 40,000 people die from hunger related causes everyday. About 850 million of them are still illiterate which exclude them from formal knowledge and information.

"The effects of these inequalities are felt mostly in rural area amongst men and women alike," he added.

The second SOMRDPE meeting, from October 29 to 30, saw participation from Asean countries like Brunei, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Phillipines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

Myanmar sent representative from the embassy and Cambodia acts as observer.

The objectives of the meeting are to discuss on three priority projects which have been identified by the Asean Expert Group meeting held on December 17 to 18 last year in Yogyakarta, Indonesia.

The projects are:

- * Training of facilitators on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication.
- * Campaign for Enhancing National and Regional Public Awareness on Rural

Development and Poverty Eradication.

* Building and Enhancing Capacities for Research, Assessment and Monitoring of Poverty in Asean countries.

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