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Sabah-Poverty (News Focus)

SABAH NEEDS NEW STRATEGY IN POVERTY ERADICATION

By: Muammar Kamaruddin

KOTA KINABALU, Feb 21 (Bernama) -- Sabah may be blessed with rich natural resources such as oil and forest products but quite a number of people in the state still live in poverty.

The poverty rate in Sabah is the second highest among the states in Malaysia, after Kelantan.

What could be the reason and is there a way out for the families living in poverty.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who left yesterday after a three-day visit to Sabah, said among the reasons for the high poverty rate in Sabah were inadequate development allocations in the past and the lack of focus to overcome the problem.

"Sabah used to be very rich but there was no emphasis then to bring development to the people because all got carried away with the amount of money in hand," he said.

In this regard, Dr Mahathir said the Barisan Nasional (BN), which took over the running of the state in 1994, would see to it that the exploitation of the state's rich resources for self-interests as had happened in the past did not recur.

The BN would instead allow certain capable organisations to manage Sabah's rich resources and what was reaped from it would be used in the interest of the people in the state.

Rural Development Minister Datuk Annuar Musa said Sabah needed a different strategy in poverty eradication and the number of people in the state living in poverty can be reduced by 2003.

"We need a five-year action plan specially formulated for the unique situation in Sabah. The government is aware the problem is not easy to overcome as people living in poverty are scattered even in the interiors and most of them have no economic activity," he told Bernama here.

The five-year action plan, being prepared by a committee established by the ministry, is expected to be ready within a six-month period.

"The PPRT (Hardcore Poor Eradication Project) used to focus on the building of subsidised houses but this still did not change their economic situation," said Annuar.

The Ministry is thus formulating an action plan specifically for Sabah in assisting the 12,000 hardcore poor families.

He said three groups identified for the action plan are those economically productive who could be resettled, those economically productive who need not be resettled and those without any means of sustenance.

Among the proposals include PPRT plantations which will enable participants to earn dividends apart from being paid wages for work done on the plantations.

The Ministry has agreed to allow several of its agencies such as Risda and Felcra to cooperate with the Sabah Foundation and the state government in identifying sites suitable for the PPRT plantations.

Annuar said for a start, the state government has identified 50,000 ha of land for the PPRT plantations project which would be managed by the ministry's agencies and the Sabah Foundation.

He said the ministry had also identified an area near Semporna for a commercial seaweed project similar to the chicken, fish and orchid farms programmes run in Kelantan and Terengganu.

"We are identifying more of such economic projects which could make use of the PPRT funds," he said.

Annuar estimated that proposed projects under the action plan for Sabah would need an allocation of RM100 million for the five-year period.

-- BERNAMA

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