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`Find ways to help those affected by Asian crisis'

THE existing poverty eradication programmes should also look into ways of helping Malaysians who have been affected by the Asian financial crisis.

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia's Institute of Malaysia and International Studies director Prof Ishak Shari said studies have indicated that even Malaysians in urban areas have become poorer due to the recession.

Under the Plan, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad announced that the Government will continue to undertake income-generating projects and provide amenities to improve the living standards of the poor.

For the hardcore poor, there would be intensified implementation of the Development Programme for the Hardcore Poor.

Ishak hoped that these programmes would enhance the economic status of the poor as external factors like the Asian crisis and current economic slowdown in the United States have had a big impact.

"The measures to reduce poverty must take into consideration all these factors and act on it," he said.

He also stressed that the Government should find ways to curb the inequalities in education, especially among the poor.

"I hope that the participation of the private sector in tertiary education would facilitate more avenues for poorer students to gain a better education," he said.

Ishak also lauded the Government's move to address the issue of income imbalance within ethnic groups.

"I applaud the move to increase Indian equity ownership to three per cent by 2010".

National Union of Teaching Profession (NUTP) secretary-general N. Siva Subramaniam echoed similar sentiments when he said the private sector should play a bigger role in ensuring that poor students get an education.

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