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Helping the needy get government aid

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PENANG, Thurs. - Dissemination of information on government aid schemes and how the public can tap into funds and other forms of assistance, is contained in a pamphlet which is being distributed to targeted groups nationwide.

The Ministry of Rural Development has printed 10,000 pamphlets which contain details of seven schemes available from four ministries for those in need of assistance.

"There have been cases where millions of ringgit meant for the people have been not spent," Rural Development Minister Datuk Azmi Khalid said today.

Azmi said this was simply because information had not reached the target groups, and officers in the relevant departments and State Assemblymen were either confused or lack information.

"So long as information is withheld, these funds will only remain as funds."

The pamphlets give details like contact numbers, how to obtain necessary forms and information on schemes, seed grants and programmes available from the Agriculture, Primary Resources, Entrepreneur Development and Rural Development Ministries.

The pamphlets have, for a start, been distributed to rubber smallholders in the country.

"Copies have also been sent to State Assemblymen and we will be printing more and circulating them to certain target groups such as government departments and elected representative who may need further details on certain projects," he said after launching an Eighth Malaysia Plan workshop for the ministry and its related Federal and State agencies at Hotel Equatorial.

Also present was Datuk Iskandar Dzakurnain Badaruddin, director-general of the Economic Planning Unit in the Prime Minister's Department.

The two-day event, which ends tomorrow, is being attended by 200 participants.

It is aimed at formulating strategies, through dialogues, in implementing programmes under the Eighth Malaysia Plan and the RM4.3 billion stimulus package announced by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad this week.

He also said that a revamp of the ministry would include the setting up of an inspectorate to ensure the smooth and efficient running of departments, agencies and subsidiaries under its purview.

"Even Kemas kindergartens will come under review to meet current needs of pre-school education.

"We need to maintain efficiency in all areas, ranging from financial reporting to management practices."

Azmi said the Government's package for immediate spending in a bid to cushion the impact of a global economic slowdown would yield favourable results if government agencies were to settle payment with their contractors and suppliers immediately.

"Six months is far too long," he said.