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Rural people to be taught skills

Joniston Bangkuai; Raynore Mering

TENOM, Sat. - Rural people who migrate to the urban areas would be equipped with the necessary skills to enable them to secure jobs with good income to prevent them from ending up as squatters.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the Government would set up training centres throughout the country for the rural people to acquire skills and knowledge in relevant fields.

"We need to ensure that when they (rural people) migrate to the urban areas, they would have the required skills to secure jobs with good income in order for them to have a decent living," he said.

Speaking at the ground breaking ceremony for the construction of the Tenom-Beaufort trunk road here, Dr Mahathir said currently three-fifths of the urban population were from the rural areas but this figure was expected to increase dramatically in the future.

"Many rural people who migrated to urban areas ended up as squatters because of their dismal earnings," he said.

The Prime Minister said the Government wanted the rural people who moved to the urban areas to play a role in nation building.

He said this in the wake of the clashes between squatters at Kampung Medan, Jalan Klang Lama, which have been linked to poverty.

Dr Mahathir called on the people to put aside racial sentiments to ensure continued peace and prosperity.

"We want the multiracial and multireligious society in Malaysia to live in harmony so that the Government would be able to focus on efforts to improve their livelihood," he said.

Efforts to improve the economy would be hindered if there were riots and chaos in the country.

Dr Mahathir said the Government would accelerate the implementation of rural development projects as part of concerted efforts to eradicate poverty.

He said basic infrastructure, such as electricity, water and roads, would be provided to the rural population to enable them to enjoy the same benefits as those in the urban areas.

In connection with this, he said the Government had decided to revive the Bakun hydro-electric project in Belaga, Sarawak, to supply electricity to Sarawak, and Sabah specifically.

The Prime Minister said the project, which will produce up to 2,400 megawatts of electricity, would bring down the cost of usage and boost industrial development in the two States.

The 55km Tenom-Beaufort trunk road will be built at a cost of RM300 million and is expected to be ready within the next three years.

More than 20,000 people braved the sweltering heat for more than three hours to welcome the Prime Minister and his wife Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali.

The arrival of Dr Mahathir, who was crowned with a Murut headgear, was heralded with a traditional Murut hero's welcome called angkukui.

Also present at the function were Chief Minister Datuk Osu Sukam and State Cabinet Ministers.