

Plight of urban poor to get panel's attention

By NICK LEONG

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KUALA LUMPUR: The plight of the urban poor, particularly in city squatter areas, has now received the Government's attention.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said a Cabinet committee entrusted with rural development and poverty eradication has been empowered to expand its initiatives to urban areas.

This means the fight against poverty in towns and cities was now given the same importance as in rural areas by the Government.

"We are not saying the committee will duplicate all its programmes (for the rural areas) to the urban areas, but they have the experience and the know-how to eradicate poverty," he said after opening the Federal Territory Umno Convention at the Putra World Trade Centre here yesterday.

Abdullah said there were no specific agencies to fight

poverty in urban areas previously.

"If we set up a special committee to tackle urban poverty, it will also be likely to include representatives from the relevant ministries. So, we decided to expand the scope of the committee to include urban areas," he added.

He said the committee members included the Rural Development, Education, Housing and Local Government and Entrepreneur Development ministers.

Abdullah said housing remained the biggest problem in eradicating urban poverty.

He added that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad himself chaired a Cabinet committee on squatters in the Klang Valley.

Earlier in his speech, Abdullah said Malays who migrate to the capital should change their mindset on how things work in the city.

He said although opportunities were aplenty here, the competition was much stiffer than in villages.