

'Show us the real numbers', urges Yong
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KOTA KINABALU - Sabah Progressive Party (SAPP) president Yong Teck Lee urged the state government to "show us the real numbers" to prove that poverty in Sabah is not a serious problem as claimed by the World Bank.

Chief Minister Musa Aman had refuted a World Bank report which stated that Sabah was the poorest state in Malaysia, where 40% of the nation's poor resided.

Lee said the truth would be revealed if the government can provide real facts and figures to substantiate its claim that Sabah is doing well, instead of going into denial and finding excuses.

"Chief Minister (Musa Aman), like other ministers recently, again cited the so-called e-Kasih data to put the number of hardcore poor household heads (KIRMT) at only 7,455.

"In fact, on the ground, 'e-Kasih' has already been discredited as being 'p-Kasih' meaning 'pilih kasih' (favouritism) because e-Kasih involves cash handouts to selected persons.

"Not all poor people are registered under e-Kasih. Any grassroots leader who walks around a poor village will come across many hardcore poor villagers who say they have been excluded from the e-Kasih programme," FMT quoted Yong as saying.

Yong also questioned the figures released by Musa which stated that the number of poor families in Sabah is 24,247.

"According to the Federal Minister of Agriculture and Agro-based Industry (Noh Omar) recently, 150,000 families in Malaysia received rice subsidy coupons worth RM10 each every month. Obviously, these are poor families.

"If 40% of these families are in Sabah, it gives us a figure of 60,000 such families. Even if the figures by Noh or the World Bank are not 100% accurate, the figure is way above 24,247," Yong claimed.

He then cited the mid-term report of The Ninth Malaysia Plan which listed Sabah as the poorest state with the highest poverty level at 23 per cent, saying those stats are "hard facts".

Yong suggested that the government should make use of the latest data and factor in the increased cost of living in Sabah, to calculate the poverty line by which a family is classified as poor.

"What is the poverty line income for a family of five in the rural and urban areas? Has this poverty line taken into consideration the latest increases in prices of basic necessities?

"Every villager knows that the costs of goods and transport have gone up repeatedly in the last two years, starting with the drastic fuel increases in June 2008," he said.

"In some remote regions like Banggi, the so-called fuel subsidy scheme to transport rice, sugar and other necessities to keep prices low has collapsed when the budget for fuel was

exhausted last month.

"Even the 20-sen plastic tubes of cooking oil, sugar and other basic necessities in Sandakan villages have shrunk in size.

"The lack of teachers and doctors, piped water and housing, and problems of the landless and infant mortality rate, compound the misery faced by the poor in Sabah," he said and FMT reported.

Yong blamed the country's education system for failing to equip the younger generations with essential knowledge but created many illiterate school leavers who are lacked in skills. This, he noted, has failed to help poor family to break away from the poverty cycle.

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