

Strategy to improve income in rural areas

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SHAH ALAM: A three-point strategy to develop rural areas, improve incomes and reduce the urban-rural poverty ratio was announced yesterday.

Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said the initiative, to generally ensure that rural areas would not be left behind in development, would involve:

- Development of human capital;
- New economic opportunities to ensure continuous income generation; and
- Strengthening of social institutions and implementation capacity in rural areas.

The Prime Minister said the Government was committed to bringing development to every Malaysian irrespective of whether he lived in the urban or rural area.

"Being an important social group in the country, the rural community will continue to get the attention of the Government, especially in the drawing up of national development policies and implementing development programmes," he said at the launch of the Rural Human Capital Development Programme at Stadium Melawati yesterday.

In the speech, read by Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak, Abdullah said specific measures would be introduced to develop the rural community so that they could also reap the ben-

efits of development.

Abdullah said the fortunes of rural folk had improved since Independence. "We managed to bring down the rural poverty level from 60 per cent in 1970 to only 9.6 per cent in 2004, while the hardcore poverty level was reduced from 5.2 per cent in 1990 to 1.5 per cent on 2004."

However, statistics in 2004 showed that the rural poverty level was more than double the national level and six times the poverty level in urban areas.

He said the ratio between income generated by rural and urban dwellers was currently at 1:2.11, which is almost the same as the 1:2.14 ratio in 1970.

Abdullah said the Government hoped to reduce the ratio to 1:2 by 2010.

This was why emphasis was being given to the development of quality human capital as it was the most critical element in ensuring the success of the national development agenda.

On the creation of new economic opportunities, Abdullah said under the Ninth Malaysia Plan, the Government would be developing new integrated growth centres where villages would be merged.

He said the Government would be upgrading infrastructure in rural areas.

It has allocated RM1.2 billion for water supply, RM1 billion for electricity, RM2.7 billion for building roads in rural areas and RM900,000 to upgrade village roads.