

Narrowing the rural-urban gap

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SHAH ALAM: The income gap between the rural and urban Malaysians has widened, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

The gap that had narrowed in the 1990s has declined to that of the 1970s.

"The 2004 income ratio between rural and urban folk, which was 1: 2.11, is almost similar to that of 1970 which was 1: 2.14," said Abdullah, whose speech was read out by his deputy Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak at the launch of the Rural Human Capital Development Programme here yesterday. Thousands of people from rural areas throughout the nation attended the function.

Abdullah said statistics also showed that rural poverty in 2004 was six times the rate of urban poverty.

"If this is allowed to go on, efforts to develop the nation as well as to upgrade the quality of life for all Malaysians would be adversely affected," he said, adding that immediate steps would be taken to address the problem.

He said the Government aimed at reducing the urban-rural income ratio to 1: 2 by 2010 as a mark of its commitment towards bettering the

lives of rural Malaysians.

Abdullah said a three-pronged approach would be used to develop rural communities and increase their income.

They include developing human capital and increasing the Rural and Regional Development Ministry's financial allocation for the purpose from RM7.5bil to RM10.9bil.

He said new economic opportunities would help rural folk generate long-term income and strengthen the rural-based social institutions.

According to Abdullah, new growth areas would also be opened, under the Ninth Malaysian Plan, to generate economic opportunities.

"Villages would also be unified to create growth areas and the Government would also initiate new development projects spanning across state borders," he said.

This was to allow folk from several states to enjoy the development projects initiated as well as to create income opportunities in every corner of the country, he added.

"The Government can only create the environment, show the way and provide the tools. It is up to the individual to take up the challenge and change things for the better," he added.



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