

PM: Govt aims to tackle Orang Asli school dropout rate

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BERA: Education for the Orang Asli community is one of the government's main focuses, particularly in finding solutions to students dropping out of secondary school, says Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob.

Describing education as a path for them to change the fate of their families, the Prime Minister said the government had so far provided various initiatives to further facilitate access to education for Orang Asli children at all levels of education.

This, he said, included establishing kindergartens and primary schools located close to the Orang Asli settlements, to the extent that now, the issue of primary school dropouts was almost non-existent.

"Going to secondary school is a big problem because no secondary school can be built near the Orang

Asli settlements due to fewer residents. However, we send the children to secondary schools which are equipped with a hostel.

"The government is looking for a formula to overcome this problem because the government does not want anyone's children, neither Orang Asli nor other ethnicities, to be left behind in terms of education," Bernama quoted him as saying at a press conference after launching the Peninsular Malaysia Orang Asli Association (POASM) annual general meeting here yesterday.

Ismail Sabri said the government also provided the children from the community special access to Mara Science Junior College (MRSJM) and public institutes of higher learning, besides offering full scholarships to further their studies abroad.

In another development, the

Prime Minister said the government would increase the number of Internet centres in Orang Asli settlements, in collaboration with the Communications and Multimedia Ministry.

"Through these centres, the Orang Asli community can learn to sell products online, thus ensuring that their children are not left behind in the world of education which now uses the Internet," he said.

On the issue of gazetting the land for Orang Asli settlements, Ismail Sabri said 216 settlements had been gazetted thus far; 427 more were in the application stage; and 117 had yet to submit their applications.

He said the issue would be raised in the next meeting with the Menteri Besar and Chief Ministers, as the land was under the purview of the state government.



Getting to know the people: Ismail Sabri (left) meeting with Orang Asli after launching the POASM annual general meeting in Bera. — Bernama

In addition, the Orang Asli Welfare Department would be asked to go down to the field to meet chiefs of villages that had yet to apply for the gazetting.

"We want to solve the gazetting issue to avoid any overlap, and if there is a proposal to develop the land. The government's focus is also to develop infrastructure in the village areas that have been gazetted.

"We also hope that the tok batin (village chiefs) can advise their community not to just move out or open a new village where there is no application (for gazetting), as it makes it difficult for us to provide appropriate assistance," he said.

At the event, the Prime Minister also announced an allocation of RM200,000 to POASM to help it implement the association's activities.