

**Government To Empower Entrepreneurs In Rural Areas, Says Muhyiddin
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PUTRAJAYA, Sept 26 (Bernama) -- The government will continue to focus attention to empower entrepreneurs in the rural areas in efforts to stimulate the nation's economic growth and to bring positive impact to the social sector and the country's development, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin said on Thursday.

The Deputy Prime Minister said the government through Amanah Ikhtiar Malaysia (AIM) and Tekun Nasional (TEKUN) has consistently made efforts to help and develop local entrepreneurs.

"To date, RM12.1 billion has been spent by AIM and TEKUN to help 686,000 local entrepreneurs. Of the total, 565,400 or 82 per cent of them are entrepreneurs from rural areas.

"This bears testimony that the government has always stressed on the development and well-being of traders in rural areas in nation-building initiatives," he said when launching the Rural Entrepreneurs' Carnival at Laman 1Malaysia in Precinct 2, here.

Muhyiddin said a RM1 billion additional allocation has been made to finance entrepreneurs' loans through AIM and TEKUN, adding that TEKUN has been allotted RM700 million and AIM RM300 million.

Muhyiddin said the government also provided various incentives in the form of training and financing entrepreneurial programmes.

Between 2006 and last year, the government has spent RM3.2 billion through the Rural and Regional Development Ministry and implementing agencies such as Mara, Kedah Development Authority, Johor Tenggara Development Authority and Terengganu Tengah Development Authority to implement various entrepreneurial programmes in rural areas such as technopreneurs development, integrated marketing, advisory services, entrepreneurial skills training and strategic business networking.

"To date, 90,719 entrepreneurs have benefited from the programmes," he said.

Muhyiddin also asked entrepreneurs to intensify efforts to ensure that their products and services were of high quality and met customers' taste and requirements.

He said entrepreneurs must be more creative and innovative when manufacturing their products as present day consumers are becoming increasingly sophisticated and they wanted quality products for reasonable prices.

"We must follow the footsteps of small-time traders who have become successful entrepreneurs now. We must make them as our icons. With their hardwork, seriousness, boldness and continued effort, they have succeeded in increasing the production of their products," he said.

Muhyiddin also said 15,000 major villages in the country should set up cooperatives in rural areas as a machinery to help market products and expand businesses in and outside the country.

He cited as an example the Koperasi Pelancongan Mukim Batu Putih Kinabatangan Berhad (KOPEL) which has succeeded in developing Kampung Batu Putih through the tourism industry.

"Every year about 3,000 to 7,000 tourists visited the village. Revenue earned last year totalled RM1.9 million, up 36 per cent from RM1.4 million in 2011," he said.

"In Johor, Koperasi Kampung Mawai Baru, which undertakes economic activities such as oil palm plantation, livestock rearing, mushroom cultivation and construction generated RM3.3 million last year," he added.

On the carnival, Muhyiddin said the five-day event was an important platform for local entrepreneurs to promote their products and services.

"The carnival proved to be a success as the number of entrepreneurs has increased from 76 when the event was first held to 600 today. This is because participating entrepreneurs rake in big profit from the carnival," he added.

Also present were Rural and Regional Development Minister Datuk Seri Mohd Shafie Apdal and his deputy Datuk Alexander Nantha Linggi.

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