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UMS aims to help boost rural education, livelihood

By Larry Ralon

KOTA KINABALU: Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) aims to help boost the quality of rural education and livelihood in Sabah with the official opening of its Rural Education Centre (PPLB).

The centre, which is an initiative taken by the university's School of Education and Social Development as a follow-up to a joint research activity it had conducted together with Unesco, had actually started operating two months ago.

UMS Vice Chancellor, Prof. Datuk Dr Mohd Noh Dalimin, in announcing this, said the setting up of the centre was in line with one of the Ninth Malaysia Plan (9MP) objectives to boost rural education.

"Currently, the centre is focusing more on developing programmes and activities at the school level...it will be moving into research activity, particularly on the rural related issues that need to be addressed, besides doing outreach activity," he said.

He said the outreach programme includes bringing in students from the rural area to the campus, besides moving out to the rural school to check on how the centre can assist especially in terms fulfilling the needs of rural schools which still lack important basic facilities.

"I also hope the centre will provide such exposure that emphasise on the problems in rural areas to undergraduate teachers studying at UMS," he said at the opening of a three-day education conference at Hotel Le Meridian, here, Thursday.

"This is because although we do not have problems in terms of educational contents in training these teachers, we need to also train them in terms of survival skills especially when posted to the rural area where it is a bit different compared to teaching in urban schools...especially when they are posted to rural areas which are prone to flooding or still lack important basic amenities like electricity supply," he said.

Mohd Noh said giving them such basic rural survival skills would not only help boost their own but also the confidence of the rural people where they are teaching, as these teachers can also get involved in community-based activities outside the school

besides teaching in the classroom.

"I am confident that if we do this wholeheartedly, together with the other universities, we will definitely be able to produce such teachers who see their assignment to teach in the rural area as a trust and responsibility which they must sincerely fulfil," he said.

Mohd Noh also said that UMS is currently in the process of opening its rural education office in Long Pasia.

"We are confident that this will be achieved very soon ... we will use the status of Long Pasia as a proof that rural education is the basis or part of an important responsibility for graduate teachers who are undergoing training at UMS," he said.

So far more than 2,000 teachers have graduated from the UMS, said Mohd Noh, adding that these teachers who graduated from the university are however normally posted to secondary schools which are largely located in urban areas or their outskirts.

"But we have also started the headmaster's degree in education programme at UMS, which also involves many headmasters from the rural schools in Sabah as well as Sarawak ... presently some 105 headmasters including three from Sarawak are undertaking this programme," he said.

On the National Budget 2007, Mohd Noh said it was the best news especially for the rural community when the Government announced the abolition of all school examination fees from next year.

"It is something which I myself never expected...because as a kampung boy myself, I do remember how difficult it was during those days when the time comes to pay the examination fee...definitely all especially those in the rural area fully support this," he said.

There is also great attention and big allocations for upgrading and boosting the quality of education, particularly at the public higher learning institutions, which is also a good commitment made by the Government, he said.

He also welcomed the decision made to build a public university in Kelantan.