

Soaring food prices worsen poverty issues

KUCHING: The recent soaring food prices may exacerbate the issue of poverty, especially in the Asia-Pacific region, which still accounts for more than 60 per cent of the world's undernourished population.

Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) assistant director-general Dr He Changchai said it brought about a new pattern of localised persistence of poverty, even in China and India which generally performed extremely well, in terms of overall economic growth and reduction in the number of poor.

"Generally, the poor are living in marginalised areas with poor resource endowments and extremely weak infrastructure and services, and almost with no linkages to the mainstream economy," he said.

Dr He, who is also FAO Asia and the Pacific Regional Representative, was speaking at the opening of the 22nd Session of the Asia and Pacific Commission on Agricultural Statistics (APCAS) by Deputy Chief Minister Datuk Patinggi Tan Sri Dr George Chan here yesterday.

He said the recent soaring food prices might have worsened the situation by pushing a large number of people back to poverty which had the tendency to become concentrated in certain areas and among certain social groups, despite a rapid declining rate at national-level.

Recent FAO statistics showed that 527 million people suffer from chronic hunger in the region, of which 300 million are in South Asia, 163 million in East Asia and 64 million in Southeast Asia.

Despite the rapid transformation of economies, said Dr He, over 60 per cent of the world's undernourished population were found in the region due to its large population and relatively low per capita incomes, as compared to the Latin American and the Near East and North Africa regions.

He said FAO's main mandate was to combat hunger and monitor progress in achieving the millennium development goals at halving hunger by 2015.

On the APCAS which was attended by 55 delegates from 15 member countries as well as five observers from Malaysia and Afghanistan, he said its active involvement was significant as the demand for reliable food and agricultural statistics were essential for proper planning and decision-making.

Meanwhile, chief statistician Wan Ramlah Wan Abdul Raof said the government, with cooperation from the Agriculture and Agro-based Industry ministry, Plantation Industries and Commodities Ministry and the Statistics Department, had developed a comprehensive database for agricultural statistics for policy-makers and other users.

— Bernama