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KUALA LUMPUR, NOV. 24 (BERNAMA) — DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER DR. MAHATHIR MOHAMED EXPRESSED THE HOPE TODAY THAT CO-OPERATION AMONG ASEAN COUNTRIES IN FAMILY AND POPULATION PLANNING INTEGRATED WITH DEVELOPMENT PLANNING WOULD LEAD TO IMPROVED QUALITY OF LIFE IN THE REGION.

SPEAKING AT THE OPENING OF THE MEETING OF ESEAN HEADS OF POPULATION PROGRAMMES HERE, HE SAID THAT A RAPID POPULATION GROWTH RATE WOULD ADVERSELY AFFECT SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS AND THE QUALITY OF THE ENVIRONMENT.

+TO OVERCOME THE PROBLEM WE HAVE SET UP STRONG AND VIGOROUS FAMILY PLANNING PROGRAMMES WHICH HAVE ACHIEVED SUBSTANTIAL REDUCTION OF FERTILITY RATES, HE SAID.

HE SAID THAT BY THE MIDDLE OF THIS YEAR, ASEAN COUNTRIES HAD A COMBINED POPULATION OF 246 MILLION, WHICH CONSTITUTED MORE THAN TWO-THIRDS OF THE POPULATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIA.

EXCEPT FOR SINGAPORE WHICH HAD ACHIEVED REPLACEMENT LEVEL MOST OF THE ASEAN COUNTRIES WERE CURRENTLY AIMING AT TWO PER CENT GROWTH RATE WITHIN THE NEXT DECADE OR EARLIER. -- BERNAMA MORE 1733AZ

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DR. MAHATHIR SAID THERE WAS A DESIRE AMONG THEM TO INITIATE COMMON APPROACHES AND PROJECTS SINCE THIS WOULD RESULT IN CONSIDERABLY STRENGTHENING NATIONAL RESEARCH AND PROGRAMME ACTIVITIES.

+IT IS IN THIS SPIRIT OF REGIONAL CO-OPERATION TO TRANSLATE THE PLAN TO ACTION THAT THIS MEETING OF THE ASEAN POPULATION PROGRAMMES IN THE CONTEXT OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT IS HELD HERE. +

HE SAID THAT THE DISCUSSION OF COMMON CONSTRAINTS AND PROBLEM OF INTEGRATING FAMILY AND POPULATION PLANNING ACTIVITIES INTO OTHER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES WOULD LEAD TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF NEW APPROACHES AND STRATEGIES TOWARDS THE SOLUTION OF THESE PROBLEMS IN ASEAN COUNTRIES.

DR. MAHATHIR SAID ANOTHER PROBLEM WHICH REQUIRED URGENT ACTION IN THESE COUNTRIES WAS THE ERADICATION OF POVERTY.

A THE POOR IN BOTH THE URBAN AND RURAL AREAS WERE GROWING AT WIDENFASTER RATE THAN BETTER-OFF FAMILIES AND THIS WOULD WIDEN THE GAP BETWEEN THE +HAVES+ AND +HAVES-NOT+ SOCIALLY AND ECONOMICALLY -- BERNAMA MORE 1736/A7

+HERE, POPULATION AND FAMILY PLANNING CAN HELP TO OVERCOME SOME ASPECTS OF THE PROBLEM. +

HE SAID THAT WHEN INTEGRATED WITH WELFARE SERVICES AND OTHER DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS, IT WOULD HELP NOT ONLY TO BRIDGE THE GAP BUT ALSO ERADICATE POVERTY.

+IN THE BROADER PERSPECTIVE, IT IS IMPERATIVE THAT ASEAN COUNTRIES POOL EFFORTS, RESOURCES AND EXPERTISE TO NARROW THE WIDENING GAP IN LEVELS OF LIVING BETWEEN DEVELOPING AND DEVELOPED COUNTRIES, + DR. MAHATHIR SAID.

HE SAID THAT ONE CONSEQUENCE OF RAPID INCREASE IN POPULATION WAS THE SIGNIFICANT INCREASE IN THE GROWTH RATES OF WORKING AGE POPULATION OR LABOUR FORCE AND THE UNEMPLOYMENT PROBLEM WOULD BE AGGRAVATED AS IT WAS DIFFICULT TO INCREASE EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES OF YOUTHS IN THE MODERN SECTOR.

BESET BY THESE PROBLEMS, THE ONLY THING THAT SOCIETY COULD TURN TO WAS THE CONTROL OF POPULATION GROWTH, HE ADDED. -- BERNAMA MORE 1740/AZ

THE DIRECTOR GENERAL ASEAN, MALAYSIA, HAJI ALI ABDULLAH, SAID. #123
ASEAN COUNTRIES REGARDED FAMILY PLANNING OR POPULATION PROGRAMME #123
AS AN INTEGRAL PART OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.

HE SAID IT SHOULD NOT BE CONSIDERED IN ISOLATION.

HAJI ALI SAID THE POPULATION RATE OF ASEAN PEOPLES WOULD BE DOUBLED AT THE END OF THE 20TH. CENTURY.

HE SAID THE HEADS OF GOVERNMENT RECOGNISED THE NEED TO FORMULATE NEW STRATEGIES IN POPULATION PLANNING WITH THE COLLADORATION OF THE APPROPRIATE INTERNATIONAL AGENCIES.

IT WAS THEREFORE BEFITTING FOR EXPERTS FROM ASEAN COUNTRIES MEETING HERE WITH U.N. ORGANISATIONS SUCH AS F.A.O. AND U.N.F.P.A. TO MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE BENEFIT OF MEMBERS.

NATIONAL FAMILY PLANNING BOARD CHAIRMAN, TAN SRI ABDUL JAMIL RAIS, SAID THE DEMOGRAPHIC OBJECTIVE UNDER THE THIRD MALAYSIA PLAN WAS TO BRING DOWN THE BIRTH RATE OF 31.0 TO 28.2 PER THOUSAND BY 1980.

THE BOARD PLANNED TO HAVE MORE EXTENSIVE AND INTENSIVE PROGRAMMES FOR URBAN AND RURAL AREAS TO SOLVE POPULATION PROBLEMS.

THE THREE-DAY MEETING IS BEING ATTENDED BY 40 PARTICIPANTS AND OBSERVERS FROM ASEAN C COUNTRIES. -- BERNAMA 1802/ZCM

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DR. MAHATHIR BELIEVED THAT THE MEETING WOULD HELP TO WORK OUT CO-OPERATIVE APPROACHES OR PROJECTS AND DETERMINE THE POLICIES, STRATEGIES, PROGRAMMES, RESEARCH AND TRAINING THAT SHOULD BE UNDERTAKEN BY ASEAN.

THESE CO-OPERATIVE EFFORTS COULD TAKE THE FORM OF COLLABORATION, CO-ORDINATION OR COMPLEMENTATION, HE ADDED. -- BERNAMA 1742/AZ