

BERNAMA FEATURE (FOR PUBLICATION ON OR AFTER JULY 16)

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DR. MAHATHIR IN SABAH - A GUARDED PROGNOSIS
BY FIZI AHMAT

PROGNOSIS 1

IT WAS HARD TO TELL FROM HIS COUNTENANCE.

OUTWARDLY HE WAS IMPRESSED, CRITICAL, CURIOUS, INQUISITIVE AND APPRAISING BUT ULTIMATELY THE OBSERVER WAS STILL LEFT GUESSING AS TO WHAT THE SECOND-MOST POWERFUL MAN IN THE COUNTRY WAS REALLY THINKING.

FROM THE MOMENT HE STEPPED DOWN AT KOTA KINABALU AIRPORT ON JUNE 19 FOR AN OFFICIAL VISIT TILL HE DEPARTED FROM LABUAN FIVE DAYS LATER, DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER DATUK SERI DR. MAHATHIR MOHAMED DID NOT ALLOW ANYONE TO PENETRATE HIS THOUGHTS.

HIS VISIT TO SABAH WAS SIGNIFICANTLY TIMED. THAT HE WAS AWARE OF HIS ASSESSMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS WOULD BE NOTED WHEN THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT GETS INTO THE PROCESS OF CUTTING THE PIE IN FEDERAL AIDS AND ALLOCATIONS TO STATES UNDER THE FOURTH MALAYSIA PLAN STARTING NEXT YEAR. 188

SABAH RESPONDED AS PREDICTABLY AS ANY STATE WOULD AT AN INSPECTION BY ONE OF ITS LEADERS. AND AS IT HAD SO MUCH TO SHOW TO SUCH AN IMPORTANT VISITOR, THE TIGHTLY-PACKED SCHEDULE FOR DATUK SERI DR. MAHATHIR AND HIS WIFE, DATIN SERI DR. SITI HASMAH, SENT THEM WIDELY ACROSS THE STATE FROM ALL COMPASS POINTS.

DURING THE FIVE DAYS, THEY WERE FLOWN BY TUDM NURI HELICOPTERS TO NINE STOPOVERS, SEVEN OF THEM DEEP IN THE INTERIOR WHERE THE MAJORITY OF DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS ARE LOCATED. -- BERNAMA FEATURE MORE 0805/A1

NOO2:

PROGNOŚIS 2 (BERNAMA FEATURE)

THEY VISITED PROJECTS RANGING FROM A TEA PLANTATION IN NELAPAK TO A DAIRY CATTLE RANCH IN KUNDASANG, FROM A FOREST TREE NURSERY IN KOTA BELUD TO A SHIPYARD IN LABUAN.

THE STATE IS AS DIVERSIFIED IN RESOURCES AND DEVELOPMENT AS IT IS IN ETHNIC GROUPS. THUS DATUK SERI DR. MAHATHIR SUMMED UP HIS VISIT IN A PREDICTION -- +SABAH COULD POSSIBLY BE THE PREMIER STATE IN MALAYSIA IN VIEW OF ITS LARGE POTENTIALS AND RESOURCES AND IF THE LEADERS ARE KEEN TO DEVELOP IT+ -- ALMOST LYRICAL OF A MEDICAL DOCTOR'S PROGNOŚIS OF A HEALTHY PATIENT WITH A HEALTHY FUTURE IF ALL HIS FACULTIES ARE PROPERLY TAKEN CARE OF.

AT THE PRESS CONFERENCE IN LABUAN, DATUK SERI DR. MAHATHIR SPELT OUT THE RIGID GUIDELINES FRAMING HIS VISIT WHICH ENTAILED, PRIMARILY, A STATE-WIDE TOUR OF ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES, PARTICULARLY THOSE IN THE RURAL AREAS, TO SEEK AN INSIGHT INTO THE RATE AND METHODOLOGY OF DEVELOPMENT CONDUCTED BY THE STATE GOVERNMENT.

HE WAS SATISFIED, HE SAID, WITH THE OVERALL PERFORMANCE OF THE STATE IN TRYING TO HELP THE RURAL POOR AND ITS INITIATIVE IN SETTING UP NEW INDUSTRIES.

HE REFUSED TO COMMENT ON THE UNIQUE POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT EMERGING FROM THE PROPOSED PACT BETWEEN USNO, A MEMBER OF THE PARISAN NASIONAL AND THE LEADING OPPOSITION PARTY IN THE STATE, AND THE PASOK AND SGCP PARTIES IN THE COMING ELECTIONS TO CHALLENGE THE BULIUNG BERJAYA PARTY, ALSO A PARISAN MEMBER. -- BERNAMA FEATURE MORE 0805/A1

NO03:

PROGNOSIS 3 (BERNAMA FEATURE)

INSTEAD, HE SAID ONLY THE BARISAN NASIONAL'S SUPREME COUNCIL COULD MAKE ANY DECISION REGARDING THE ISSUE, ADDING +IN MY POSITION, I CANNOT THINK ALOUD IN PUBLIC.+

MAINTAINING HIS STREAM OF CONCENTRATION ON ECONOMIC MATTERS, HE REFLECTED ON THE FIVE AGREEMENTS SIGNED IN HIS PRESENCE BETWEEN THE STATE GOVERNMENT AND FOREIGN INVESTORS AND COMMENTED THAT THE LARGEST, INVOLVING A CAPITAL OF \$325 MILLION WITH THE DAEWOO INDUSTRIAL COMPANY OF SOUTH KOREA TO PRODUCE SPONGE IRON, WOULD CERTAINLY BENEFIT THE PEOPLE AND STATE, IF SUCCESSFUL.

MINDFUL OF A POSSIBLE WEAK LINK, HE SAID IT WOULD NOT BE TOO BIG A RISK, HOWEVER, AS ONE OF THE PARTNERS WAS WILLING TO BUY A LARGE PORTION OF THE PRODUCTS.

AFTER BEING BRIEFED ON THE PROJECT AT THE ECONOMIC PLANNING UNIT FIVE DAYS EARLIER, HE HAD APPARENTLY BEEN APPREHENSIVE AND HAD CONDUCTED A THOROUGH STUDY ON THE PROJECT'S VIABILITY.

IT WAS AT THE SAME BRIEFING THAT SABAH STATED ITS CASE AND ARGUMENTS AND PRESENTED ITS PROBLEMS AND SHORTCOMINGS AND CHIEF MINISTER DATUK HARRIS SALLEH MADE NO BONES ABOUT MAKING KNOWN SABAH'S NEEDS.

TOUCHING ON THE WHOLE SPECTRUM OF SABAH'S DEVELOPMENT TARGETS AND ITS NEEDS FOR EQUITABLE MONETARY ALLOCATIONS COMPARED WITH THE OTHER STATES, DATUK HARRIS STRESSED IN EARNEST THAT +FOR SABAH TO BE ON PAR WITH THE OTHER MALAYSIAN STATES, THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT MUST VIEW ITS REQUEST APPRECIATIVELY.+ -- BERNAMA FEATURE
MORE 0813/A1

N004:

PROGNOSIS 4 (BERNAMA FEATURE)

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OBVIOUSLY HE WAS NOT TRYING TO DEFEND THE FORT WITH ONLY ONE CANNON.

FIGURES SHOW THAT SABAH HAD ACHIEVED 90 PER CENT OF ITS DEVELOPMENT TARGETS UNDER THE THIRD MALAYSIA PLAN AND +IF THIS RATE IS TO BE CONTINUED, THE STATE WILL NEED THE AMOUNT REQUESTED FOR UNDER THE FOURTH MALAYSIA PLAN,+ DATUK HARRIS REASONED.

STANDING ON FIRM GROUND AND BACKED BY IMPRESSIVE STATISTICS, SABAH HAS REQUESTED FOR AN ALLOCATION OF \$8,770 MILLION UNDER THE FOURTH MALAYSIA PLAN, A THREE-FOLD JUMP FROM THE THIRD MALAYSIA PLAN FIGURE OF \$2,798 MILLION.

DATUK HARRIS SAID: +SABAH IS ASKING FOR ABOUT HALF THAT AMOUNT FROM THE FEDERAL COFFERS AND WILL ASSUME THE RESPONSIBILITY OF RAISING THE OTHER HALF.

DATUK SERI DR. MAHATHIR SAT THROUGH THE BRIEFING IMPASSIVELY BUT LATER STATED THAT THE DEVELOPMENT'S DECISION IN ALLOCATING FUNDS AND THAT WHY DECISION WOULD BE BASED NOT ONLY ON A STATE'S PERFORMANCE BUT ALSO ON THE CONSIDERATION OF OTHER FACTORS SUCH AS THE NEEDS OF OTHER AREAS WHICH THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT HAS TO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT. — BERNAMA FEATURE MORE 0815/AZ

PROGNOSIS 5 (BERNAMA FEATURE)

THE DAY BEFORE DATUK SERI DR. MAHATHIR SPOKE IN LABUAN, DATUK HUSSEIN HAD ANNOUNCED THAT THE METHOD OF DISTRIBUTING THE WEALTH AND FINANCIAL AIDS TO STATES UNDER THE FOURTH MALAYSIA PLAN WOULD BE REVISED.

WHILE NOT COMMITTING THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S STANCE AS FAR AS SABAH WAS CONCERNED, DATUK SERI DR. MAHATHIR SUCCINCTLY SAID, WITH REFERENCE TO THE PRIME MINISTER'S STATEMENT, THAT +THERE ARE AREAS AND GROUPS OF PEOPLE WHO HAVE NOT HAD THE UPLIFTMENT THEY SHOULD BE GETTING AND THAT THE VULNERABLE POINTS UNDER THE PRESENT METHOD OF EVALUATION WILL BE REVIEWED.+

DATUK SERI DR. MAHATHIR HOWEVER PAID TRIBUTE TO SABAH'S EFFORTS IN MAINTAINING THE TIMBER SUPPLY, ONE OF THE STATE'S MOST VALUABLE ASSETS.

SABAH'S REAFFORESTATION PROGRAMME WAS A RIGHT STEP TOWARD REPLACING TIMBER CUT DOWN FOR EXPORT, R. MAHATHIR COMMENTED, ALTHOUGH HE POINTED OUT HE WAS NOT A FANTICAL BELIEVER IN CONSERVATION.

+ALTHOUGH I SUPPORT CONSERVATION, I FEEL THAT IF THERE IS A NEED TO CLEAR A CERTAIN FOREST FOR DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS TO HELP PEOPLE, IT SHOULD BE DONE.

+THERE IS NO CASE HERE FOR PEOPLE WHO BLINDLY ADVOCATE THE KEEPING OF OUR FORESTS JUST BECAUSE IT IS BEAUTIFUL AND PRECIOUS,+ HE SAID.

+I AGREE IT IS A PRECIOUS COMMODITY BUT THE LIVELIHOOD OF THE PEOPLE IS ALSO PRECIOUS. JUST TO SEE NICE BIG TREES WHILE PEOPLE ARE STARVING IS NOT MY IDEA OF CONSERVATION,+ HE ADDED VEHEMENTLY.

— BERNAMA FEATURE MORE 0819/AZ

PROGNOSIS 6 (BERNAMA FEATURE)

THE REAFFORESTATION OF SABAH'S TIMBER LAND WAS JUST ONE OF THE MANY PROJECTS DATUK SERI DR. MAHATHIR WAS GIVEN AN INSIGHT INTO.

THE DELEGATION WAS ALSO TAKEN ON AN INSPECTION TOUR OF THE OTHER ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES, PRIMARILY AGRI-BASED PROJECTS USING ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY AND IMPLEMENTED ON A LARGE-SCALE.

ONE WAS THE TEA PLANTATION IN NELAPAK, SAID TO BE THE BIGGEST TEA PLANTATION IN THE WORLD, ANOTHER WAS THE STRAWBERRY FARM IN KUNDASANG, THE TEXAS-STYLED CATTLE RANCH COMPLETE WITH COWBOYS ON HORSES AND BIG ENOUGH TO RIVAL THE BIGGEST TEXAS SPREAD, AND CORN FIELDS WORKED BY COMBINED HARVESTERS.

THE LABUAN SHIPYARD HAS JUST COMPLETED CONSTRUCTION OF THE BIGGEST SHIP EVER BUILT IN THE COUNTRY TO CARRY AUSTRALIAN CATTLE FOR THE DAIRY FARMS.

IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS, DATUK SERI DR. MAHATHIR'S VISIT WAS UNMISTAKABLY ONE OF FAMILIARISATION AND FACT-FINDING.

HOW HE EVALUATED SABAH'S PERFORMANCE CAN PERHAPS BE GAUGED BY HIS COMMENT +THEY HAVE DONE A GOOD JOB+. BUT HOW HE WILL RATE IT IN THE ALLOCATION OF FUNDS UNDER THE FOURTH MALAYSIA PLAN, HOWEVER, WILL REMAIN A BIG QUESTION. — BERNAMA FEATURE 0822/AZ