

MAHATHIR-POPULATION

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KUALA LUMPUR, APRIL 10 (BERNAMA) -- (DATUK SERI D.R. MAHATHIR MOHAMAD SAID TODAY THAT EFFORTS TO INCREASE THE POPULATION WILL TURN TO NAUGHT IF THE NATION HAD TO WAIT FOR POVERTY TO BE ERADICATED.

THE PRIME MINISTER SAID THAT EVEN IN WEALTHY AMERICA, THERE WERE PEOPLE WHO WERE LIVING BELOW THE POVERTY LINE.

THIS ONLY GOES TO SHOW THAT NO COUNTRY WOULD BE ABLE TO COMPLETELY ERADICATE POVERTY, HE SAID.

+POVERTY WILL SURELY EXIST BUT THIS WILL NOT MEAN THAT THE STANDARD OF LIVING CANNOT BE UPGRADED,+ DATUK SERI DR. MAHATHIR QUIPPED.

THE PRIME MINISTER WAS SPEAKING IN THE EHWAL SEMASA PROGRAMME OVER TELEVISYEN MALAYSIA TONIGHT. THE PANELISTS OF THE PROGRAMME INCLUDED BERNAMA ECONOMIC SERVICE'S DEPUTY EDITOR ENCIK HASHIM MAKARUDDIN, UTUSAN MELAYU GROUP FEATURES EDITOR CIK ROSNAH MAJID AND RTM'S DIRECTOR OF NEWS AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS ENCIK SALLEH PATEH AKHIR.

DATUK SERI DR. MAHATHIR ALSO EXPRESSED OPTIMISM THAT THE NATION'S POPULATION WOULD BE INCREASED AND THE STANDARD OF LIVING OF THE PEOPLE UPGRADED IN 115 YEARS. -- MORE 1834/SL

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BUT, THIS COULD ONLY TAKE PLACE IF THE PEOPLE WERE WILLING TO WORK HARD AND FACE THE NUMEROUS CHALLENGES, AND WITH PLANNING UNDER-TAKEN IN A MORE SYSTEMATIC MANNER.

EARLIER, HE SAID THAT THE 70 MILLION POPULATION TARGET OF THE GOVERNMENT WAS ONLY AN ESTIMATED FIGURE.

+IT DOES NOT MEAN THAT ONE DAY, THE POPULATION OF MALAYSIA WILL BE 70 MILLION, NOT ONE PERSON LESS OR ONE PERSON MORE.

+THE 70 MILLION FIGURE AROSE FOLLOWING CALCULATIONS IN RELATION TO THE SIZE OF THE COUNTRY, HE SAID.

DATUK SERI DR. MAHATHIR SAID THAT MALAYSIA WAS BIGGER THAN, FOR EXAMPLE, BRITAIN. +THEY HAVE 50 MILLION (PEOPLE), WHY CAN'T WE, WITH A BIGGER LAND SIZE, HAVE 70 MILLION,+ HE ASKED.

HE SAID THAT FIGURES PREPARED BY THE NATIONAL FAMILY PLANNING BOARD SHOWED THAT MALAYSIA WOULD HAVE A POPULATION OF 35 MILLION IN 115 YEARS.

+THEREFORE, IF WE CAN DOUBLE THAT, WE SURELY CAN HAVE 70 MILLION,+ HE ADDED. -- MORE 1903/SL

THE PRIME MINISTER SAID THAT THE 35 MILLION POPULATION FIGURE WAS BASED ON THE PRESENT BIRTH RATE OF 2.2 OR 2.3; IF THE BIRTH RATE COULD BE REVERTED TO THE ORIGINAL RATE OF 3.2, THERE WAS A POSSIBILITY THAT THE 70, MILLION POPULATION COULD BE ACHIEVED, HE SAID.

*AND AT THE SAME TIME, IF WE LOOK AFTER OUR HEALTH, PROVIDE ADEQUATE EDUCATION ON HEALTH CARE AND FIND WAYS TO SPACE OUT BIRTHS, THE SURVIVAL RATE WILL INCREASE, HE SAID.

THIS, HE SAID, WOULD SURELY HELP INCREASE THE POPULATION TO 70 MILLION IN 113 YEARS.

DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR SAID THAT THERE WERE TWO TYPES OF POVERTY -- ABSOLUTE POVERTY WHICH COULD BE ERADICATED AND RELATIVE POVERTY WHICH COULD NOT BE OVERCOME.

ABSOLUTE POVERTY, ACCORDING TO HIM, WAS A SITUATION WHERE DESTITUTES WENT AROUND SCAVENGING FOR FOOD AND THIS, HE SAID, DID NOT EXIST IN MALAYSIA.

RELATIVE POVERTY WAS A SITUATION WHERE THERE EXISTED PEOPLE WHO WERE RICH AND PEOPLE WHO WERE POOR.

+WHAT WE CAN DO IS TO REDUCE THE GAP BETWEEN THE POOR AND THE RICH. THAT'S ALL, HE SAID.

THE PRIME MINISTER ALSO SAID THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAD NOT DETERMINED THE POVERTY-LINE BASED ON ANY SPECIFIC INCOME FIGURE BECAUSE THIS WOULD NOT BE ACCURATE AS THE SITUATION DIFFERED FROM PLACE TO PLACE.

FOR EXAMPLE, IF \$500 WAS FIXED AS THE POVERTY LINE, THERE COULD BE A POSSIBILITY THAT A PERSON WHO EARNED THAT AMOUNT IN A PARTICULAR PLACE COULD BE CONSIDERED RICH, BUT ANOTHER PERSON IN A DIFFERENT PLACE EARNING THE SAME AMOUNT COULD BE CONSIDERED POOR, HE SAID.

+WHAT IS NECESSARY FOR US IS A FAMILY OF FIVE CHILDREN, WITH ENOUGH FOOD, CLOTHING AND SHELTER, EITHER LIVING IN A RENTED HOUSE OR IN A HOUSE OF THEIR OWN, HE SAID.

+WITH THE THREE FACTORS USED IN ASSUMING THE POVERTY LINE, WE EXPECT THAT THE PEOPLE WILL NOT BE POOR. THIS IS WHY WE CANNOT GIVE FIGURES, HE ADDED.

THE GOVERNMENT COULD READJUST THE POVERTY LINE LATER WHEN THE STANDARD OF LIVING ROSE OR WHEN GOVERNMENT SUBSIDIES WERE INCREASED. *BERNAMA*