

Mahathir: All must chip in to fight poverty

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today called for a change in the people's attitude towards the fight against poverty, saying that the success so far achieved does not measure up to the effort and money invested.

He said one of the major barriers towards greater success in poverty eradication measures was the fact that whatever aid provided was not utilised effectively.

Opening a day-long convention on poverty organised by Umno Youth, the Prime Minister said: "One of the main problems we face in our efforts to eradicate poverty is that the people do not want to or cannot use effectively whatever assistance given to them.

"Nevertheless, the lack of ability or knowledge on how to use the aid given can be overcome by proper guidance and experience."

Analysis

However, Dr Mahathir said, the basic element necessary to ensure the success of the Government's efforts was still, interest on the part of the people.

"If the people don't have the interest, then all our efforts, system and assistance and whatever else we do, will be in vain."

The people, including the poor, therefore, have to honour their responsibility to improve their own socio-economic situation, as the Government could not shoulder the burden alone.

Without such a change in their attitude and philosophy, he warned that

the country would not progress further in trying to wipe out poverty.

Dr Mahathir said the phenomenon of developed countries which prospered despite the lack of rich natural resources was solely due to the spirit, industriousness and willingness of their people to face challenges.

He said that those who only depended on the help of others would remain backward even though their countries were rich and full of silver and gold.

Dr Mahathir also called for a deeper analysis of the problem of poverty in order to understand it and identify the correct remedy.

He said that increasing financial assistance to the poor when money was not the problem would not yield the desired results.

"Why is it that the Government's action and efforts were unproductive? Is it because we need more allocations and effort to achieve our objectives? Or is there something wrong in our strategies?"

Dr Mahathir said the amount of money the Government spent could have easily eradicated poverty in many less developed countries but as such, the poverty rate in the country was reduced from 49.3 per cent in 1970 to about 18 per cent in 1984.

However, providing direct material aid was not enough as this was only a temporary solution.

"Our emphasis should be to find out the reasons behind it so that poverty could be stopped once and for all," he said.

The Prime Minister said a good example in eradicating poverty was the awarding of scholarships to needy students.