

Detailed study on poverty needed: Dr M

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By Loo Yok Soi

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today a detailed study should be made to determine why poverty still exists in the country despite government efforts to overcome it.

He said the Government managed to reduce the poverty rate from 49.3 per cent in 1970 to 18 per cent in 1984.

However, this was below expectation considering the efforts made and the money spent on eradicating poverty, he said when opening an Umno Youth convention on poverty here.

He also launched the guidelines for adoption of villages under Umno Youth's poverty eradication programme.

The Prime Minister said the 18 per cent in the po-

verty group did not face starvation.

They were also not denied schooling, medical or transportation facilities.

"The poor in this country can still enjoy some of the basic needs of life and facilities provided by the Government," he said.

He said poverty in Malaysia was not at a level where people were starving.

"There are groups of people without an income and had to beg for a living but their number is small.

"Others are only relatively poor — that is, poor compared with the rich," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the money spent and the measures taken by the Government to alleviate the hardship of the poor could have effectively wiped out poverty in many under-developed countries.

"Why are we unsuccessful

in the actions we have taken?"

"Why do we always need additional allocation and efforts to achieve our objectives? Or have we erred somewhere in our strategy?" he asked.

"Without knowing the reasons for poverty, all efforts to eradicate poverty will be to no avail," Dr Mahathir said.

He said one possible reason hampering the success of the Government's poverty eradication programme is that the people receiving aid could not or did not use it effectively due to lack of interest or incapability.

He said providing cash and direct aid were not the ways to eradicate poverty.

Quoting Confucius — that it is better to teach a person to fish than give him fish to eat — Dr Mahathir said many still did not appreciate

the moral of the saying and thought that it was cruel to do so.

"But we must understand that it is the fishing rod that will keep hunger away from the man who asks for food, not the little amount of food we give him for the day," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the Government had tried to introduce modern farming methods and integrated farming, set up small industries and formed co-operatives to market fertiliser and other agricultural needs.

But government efforts alone were not enough to overcome the poverty problem, he said. "The poor too have a responsibility to improve their living standards."

He said a country with fertile land and endowed with gold and silver would still remain backward if the people only depended on others for help.

"A country and community which is diligent and willing to face challenges will succeed and progress," he said.

He said from the Second Malaysia Plan (1971-1975) until now, the concept of poverty and strategies to overcome it were constantly being reviewed and improved for the people's well-being.

He said that although poverty eradication efforts were focussed more on the rural areas where the poverty rate was higher, the

urban areas were not being neglected.

He said one of the best ways to eradicate poverty was through providing scholarships.

Dr Mahathir praised Umno Youth for holding the convention, saying the Government would study the resolutions adopted.

Earlier, acting Umno Youth leader Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said the movement had identified 113 poor villages for adoption under its poverty eradication project.

Under the project, the movement will get several government departments and agencies to concentrate their activities in the villages.