

PM: Local councillors need to be more efficient

Keeping up with urban Malaysia

By kor Hawa Yunus

HUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. — Malaysia's growing urbanisation is expected to result in at least 60 per cent of its population living in towns by the year 2000 with Bumiputeras forming the majority in most towns, the national conference for local government councillors was told today.

Already close to 50 per cent of the population is projected to be living in urban centres by next year, with Bumiputeras forming 45.6 per cent, Chinese 43.7 per cent and Indians 10.1 per cent.

The rapid increase in urban dwellers — 27 per cent in 1970 to 46 per cent in 1986 — has been attributed to rural-urban migration.

"Rural-urban migration cannot be avoided because it comes with development," said Prime Minister **Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad** when opening the one-day conference attended by about 2,800 local councillors.

Citing the United States as an example, he said 95 per cent of its population lived in towns today compared with five per cent 200 years ago, indicating that a high urban population signifies the level of development and progressiveness of a country.

The changing urban population profile also reflected the success of the policy to restructure the urban population, said deputy director-general of local government **Dr Muhammad Nong** in his paper ***and duties of local councillors in 1990s: A development perspective.***

In his speech the Prime Minister said in view of the higher number of town and city dwellers, the role of local authorities would become more important.

He said local councillors would have to become more dedicated and efficient as well as improve and

streamline their administration with that of the State and Federal Governments.

Local councillors would have to deal with more administrative matters as well as tackle problems that come with growth such as squatter, drainage, sanitation, rubbish and environmental issues.

Dr Mahathir said: "All these problems will increase because it cannot be avoided. Whether we can overcome part of this problem will depend on the ingenuity and dedication of local councillors. There is no point in saying that the country is rich and progressive but its towns and people are drowned in rubbish."

Dr Mahathir spoke of the need for people to be civic-minded and to preserve the cleanliness of their towns.

At the same time, local councillors must also ensure that the towns were properly managed so that the people would have a better and more comfortable life.

Public toilets, for example, must always be kept clean, he said, stressing that action should not be taken only after a Minister had inspected the toilets.

Dr Mahathir said local councillors should not regard their position as a rank but must work together with their officers so that their administration would be effective and uninterrupted.

They should look at new administrative styles adopted by other local authorities as well as State and Federal Governments.

Dr Mahathir said there should be a competition for the best and cleanest-kept town as an incentive for local councillors to preserve the beauty and cleanliness of areas under their jurisdiction, adding that the Government would consider sending the winners abroad for visits.

He said the Government, based on its financial position, would also give financial assistance for certain projects undertaken by local authorities.

The Prime Minister also noted that the administration of local

Why it's better to appoint councillors

★ FROM PAGE ONE

authorities was now more efficient since local councillors were appointed instead of elected.

He noted that when elections were held for local governments, the issues that induced the people to elect their representatives were not local issues but those related to racial, national or international issues fanned by the political parties.

He said local issues like services for the people in the area were not given attention and the result was that people did not benefit from the system.

Dr Mahathir said early

after independence a study was carried out and it came out with a recommendation that the system of election for local government be abandoned.

"After the local councillors were appointed it was found that they were more responsible and responsive towards local issues. Local council meetings are now calm with more time devoted to discussions on local issues."

However, he said the system would have its weaknesses if local councillors felt that they were not responsible to the people under their jurisdiction but to those (the Government) who appointed them.

In his paper, Dr Muhammad Nong also said that many local governments did not have specific programmes to ensure their townships develop in a systematic and controlled manner.

He listed the implications of the urbanisation trend as follows:

- the influx of people, mainly unskilled, from rural areas will create major socio-economic problems like urban poverty, squatters and the unsystematic growth of the informal sectors like hawking;

- the local governments must provide adequate urban services and amenities to meet the growing de-

mand. Master plans for solid waste and sewage disposal must be drawn up now; and.

- the problems of unemployment, environmental pollution and traffic congestion will worsen especially in major towns like Ipoh, Penang, Johore Baru, Petaling Jaya, Klang and Malacca.

Dr Muhammad said local governments need to have a comprehensive economic programme to overcome the likely problems of the 1990s.

He added that the local councillors must therefore equip themselves with the necessary skills and knowledge in order to play an ef-

fective role in the planning and development of their towns.

After the opening ceremony, Kelantan Deputy Menteri Besar Datuk Haji Ahmad Rastom Haji Ahmad Maher presented Dr Mahathir with a memorandum on behalf of the conference.

The memorandum which focuses and examines the role of local authorities, urged the Government to increase its financial assistance to local authorities as well as channel funds that had been approved directly to the local authority concerned and not to other agencies.