

There will be no racial discrimination, says PM

Poverty plan will be fair

By Jeffrey Ramayah

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. — There will be no racial discrimination in the Government's implementation of the \$391 million poverty eradication programme, the Prime Minister assured the Dewan Rakyat today.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad reiterated that the Government has never discriminated against any race when implementing projects for the poor.

He said the Government would distribute its 1989/90 allocation for the programme fairly. The very poor, irrespective of race, will be given monthly financial assistance.

Replying to a question from Datuk Haji Mohamed Abu Bakar Rautin Ibrahim (BN-Kuala Kedah), the Prime Minister said the Government was committed to eradicating poverty throughout the country and the question of whether all races would benefit from this special programme should not arise at all.

\$391m allocation

In reply to supplementary questions, he said the Government would provide special financial assistance and other benefits for the very poor, that is, families of five whose monthly income is \$175 or less.

Asked whether the Government plans to raise the \$175 eligibility level for aid to \$300, he said there were two categories of poor people.

"A family of five earning less than \$175 certainly cannot live reasonably and the people under this category do not have the means to improve their income.

"These people are considered as hardcore poor.

"Those earning less than \$300 are also poor but they have the means to earn more if they want to.

"There are also people who earn \$1,000 a month but still claim to be poor and that is why we have worked out estimates in determining the hardcore poor who need Government assistance."

Dr Mahathir, in his reply to the original question on the Government's plan to eradicate po-

verty and to what extent the \$391 million allocation for the programme could contribute to this objective, said various other programmes have been implemented to eradicate poverty.

He said the aim of the programme for the very poor was to assist the people increase productivity and income, provide more jobs, and more facilities and social benefits.

He said among the programmes to eradicate poverty being implemented are:

- new land development, regional development and resettlement;
- land rehabilitation and replanting;
- integrated agricultural development;
- new approach for kampung and rural development;
- fisheries and animal husbandry;
- agricultural support services; and,
- provision of social services and basic infrastructures.

The Prime Minister said with these measures, the poverty rate for Peninsular Malaysia had dropped from 49.3 per cent in 1970 to 17.3 per cent in 1987.

For Sabah, the rate had dropped from 58.3 per cent in 1976 to 35.3 per cent in 1987. For Sarawak, it went down from 56.5 per cent in 1976 to 24.7 per cent in 1987.

Dr Mahathir said although these measures have been implemented to overcome poverty there was still a small group left behind in development.

"Therefore, this programme is designed for the hardcore poor who are defined as families with per capita income of less than \$35 a month or \$175 per family of five.

"To ensure that this aid indeed reaches the hardcore poor a register of such families must be maintained in every district.

"Only the hardcore poor who meet the criteria will be listed in this register and only those who have been registered can receive aid under this programme," he said.

He hoped this programme, with an allocation of \$391 million, will be able to reduce poverty in line with the New Economic Policy objective of 17 per cent in 1990.

The Prime Minister said it was odd to have Malaysians who are poor while immigrants staying here were enjoying better incomes.