

D450

R E136 AAE BMX
MAHATHIR-FOOD

KUALA LUMPUR, SEPT 3 (BERNAMA) -- DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR MOHAMAD SAID TODAY UNJUSTIFIED CLAIMS ON HEALTH AND SAFETY IN THE DEVELOPED COUNTRIES WERE DEPRIVING CONSUMERS OF CHEAP SOURCES OF FOOD FROM DEVELOPING COUNTRIES.

THE PRIME MINISTER SAID MASSIVE CAMPAIGNS WHICH ACTUALLY HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH HEALTH AND SAFETY WERE LAUNCHED BY CERTAIN PEOPLE PURELY FOR THEIR OWN ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS.

OPENING THE FIRST ASIAN CONFERENCE ON FOOD SAFETY HERE, HE SAID SUCH IRRESPONSIBLE BEHAVIOUR WAS NOT CONTRIBUTING TO FOOD SAFETY OR TO OVERCOMING POVERTY OR FOOD SHORTAGES.

THE OVER-ZEALOUS IMPLEMENTATION OF QUARANTINE MEASURES WAS ANOTHER TRADE BARRIER WHICH PREVENTED DIRECT EXPORTS OF FRESH PRODUCE AND ANIMAL PRODUCTS FROM DEVELOPING COUNTRIES, HE ADDED.

CALLING ON IMPORTERS TO BE REALISTIC IN SETTING SPECIFICATIONS AND STANDARDS, HE SAID IN THE PAST FEW YEARS, A NUMBER OF FOOD TRADE ISSUES HAD CLOUDED RELATIONS BETWEEN PRODUCING DEVELOPING COUNTRIES AND THE DEVELOPED CONSUMER AND PRODUCER COUNTRIES.

+ADVANCEMENTS IN ANALYTICAL TECHNIQUES HAVE MADE POSSIBLE THE DETECTION OF CONTAMINANTS, AT FIRST IN PARTS PER MILLION, THEN, PARTS PER BILLION AND NOW PARTS PER TRILLION,+ HE ADDED. -- MORE
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THE PRIME MINISTER SAID SCIENTISTS WOULD CONTINUE TO CHASE THE ELUSIVE ZERO BUT HE ASKED WHETHER THAT WAS REALISTIC FOR IMPLEMENTATIONS.

HE ALSO SPOKE OF AN ATTEMPT, LATELY, TO MISLEAD CONSUMERS IN THE DEVELOPED COUNTRIES WITH SUCH LABELLING AS +NO TROPICAL OIL+.

HE SAID THAT INGREDIENTS LABELLING, REQUIRED BY LAWS, WAS MEANT TO INFORM CONSUMERS AND NOT TO DECEIVE THEM.

IF IT WAS WRONG TO HIGHLIGHT THE +GOODNESS+ OF CERTAIN FOODS, IT MUST BE EQUALLY WRONG TO DECEIVE CONSUMERS ON THE +BADNESS+ OF THE FOODS, HE ADDED.

HE SAID IT WAS EVEN MORE WRONG WHEN THE INTENTION WAS TO GET A COMPETITIVE EDGE FOR ANOTHER PRODUCT.

DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR SAID: +FOOD SCIENTIST, LIKE ALL SCIENTISTS, HAVE BEEN RELUCTANT TO VOICE THEIR OPINION FOR FEAR OF BEING QUOTED INACCURATELY.+

BUT, HE ADDED, IT WAS A SCIENTIST'S RESPONSIBILITY AND THE JOURNALIST'S DESIRE TO BE CLEAR TO THE PUBLIC BY USING NON-SCIENTIFIC LANGUAGE WITHOUT SACRIFICING ACCURACY.

HE SAID: +TOO OFTEN THE EXPERT EXPLAINS SCIENTIFIC CONSENSUS, AND MAY FEEL THE JOB IS COMPLETED BY MERE ACCURATE TRANSMISSION OF FACTS. -- MORE

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+BUT TELLING A MOTHER THE RESIDUE SHE JUST FED HER BABY HAS LESS THAN A ONE IN A MILLION CANCER RISK DOES NOT REDUCE HER FEAR, BUT ALIENATES HER FURTHER.

+ON THE OTHER HAND, THE MASS MEDIA SHOULD BE MORE RESPONSIBLE IN THEIR REPORTING, AND NOT CAUSE CONSUMER ALARM WITH THEIR MEDIA OUTBREAK.+

DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR ALSO SAID THAT FOOD SAFETY APPEARED TO BE ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST WIDESPREAD HEALTH PROBLEMS DUE IN PART TO MORE RECENT DEVELOPMENTS OF MODERN SOCIETY.

HE ADDED: +THE WIDESPREAD USE OF AGROCHEMICALS IS AN EXAMPLE OF THE DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD OF MODERN TECHNOLOGY -- WITHOUT THEM OUR FOOD PRODUCTION WOULD BE SEVERELY LIMITED, BUT THEIR USE ALSO POSES RISKS TO OUR ENVIRONMENT AND HEALTH AND IN SOME INSTANCES TO FOOD SOURCES THEMSELVES.

+WHILE SCIENTIFIC PROGRESS HAS OFFERED THE ADVANTAGES OF A MORE ABUNDANT, DIVERSE AND SAFER FOOD SUPPLY, ASSURING THE SAFETY OF FOOD REQUIRES CONSTANT VIGILANCE BASED ON THE MOST MODERN AND UP-TO-DATE METHODS AND KNOWLEDGE.+

HE SAID THE WORLD WAS MOVING TOWARDS A COMMON SET OF CRITERIA FOR ASSESSING FOOD SAFETY, AND IT WAS THESE GLOBAL CRITERIA WHICH WOULD HAVE TO BE ACCEPTED AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL. -- MORE

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EFFORTS WERE BEING MADE AT THE CURRENT ROUND OF NEGOTIATIONS UNDER THE GENERAL AGREEMENT ON TARIFFS AND TRADE (GATT) TO USE AVAILABLE INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS IN ADJUDICATING DISPUTES INVOLVING ISSUES OF SAFETY AND HEALTH.

DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR SAID DEVELOPING COUNTRIES NEED TO HAVE ADEQUATE AND EFFECTIVE LAWS AND REGULATIONS WHICH WERE CONSTANTLY UPDATED TO KEEP PACE WITH CHANGES IN SOCIAL STRUCTURES, FOOD HABITS, MODERN AGRICULTURE AND FOOD TECHNOLOGY.

THERE MUST ALSO BE A COORDINATED INTERMINISTERIAL APPROACH AMONG THE IMPLEMENTING AGENCIES IN EACH COUNTRY WITH PROPER INFRASTRUCTURE AND BASIC LABORATORY FACILITIES AND UPGRADED INSPECTION SERVICES.

HE ADDED: +THESE PHYSICAL PROVISIONS WILL NOT BE OF MUCH USE IF TRAINED HUMAN RESOURCES IS NEGLECTED. THIS IS WHERE INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION WILL BE MOST APPRECIATED.+

HE SAID THERE MUST ALSO BE COMMUNITY AWARENESS OF ISSUES INVOLVED IN FOOD SAFETY AND THE PROGRAMMES SHOULD BE INTEGRATED INTO PRIMARY HEALTH CARE SYSTEMS.

BY INCREASING THEIR AWARENESS AND KNOWLEDGE OF FOOD SAFETY, CONSUMERS COULD LEARN TO PROTECT THEMSELVES AND THEIR FAMILIES FROM FOODBORNE HAZARDS BOTH IN THE MARKET PLACE AND AT HOME, HE ADDED.

SOME 400 PARTICIPANTS FROM INTERNATIONALLY RENOWNED FOOD AUTHORITIES ARE ATTENDING THE FIVE-DAY CONFERENCE AIMED AT IDENTIFYING THE MAJOR AND MOST URGENT PROBLEMS OF FOOD SAFETY IN ASIA. -- BERNAMA