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Mahathir - Children

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KUALA LUMPUR, July 18 (Bernama) -- Emphasis will be given to the physical, mental and spiritual development of children as the country's most-important human resource, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

Special attention would be given to the disadvantaged or unfortunate in the government effort which would include moulding their moral and ethical values, he added.

+Children represent the country's wealth and that of the family. Being the highest asset and highly vulnerable, they need special care and attention,+ he said at the signing of the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children at the Putra World Trade Centre (PWTC) here.

Children need to be equipped with education, skills and positive values of life as +they are the generation that will take our place in future+, he added.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said the government would' draw up policies, strategies and programmes to upgrade developmet of children and youth under the National Development Policy. -- more

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Malaysia would prepare a National Action Plan before the end of the year to implement the commitments contained in the Declaration signed today, he added.

A high-level meeting on the proposed plan would be chaired by the Prime Minister's wife, Datuk Seri Datin Paduka Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said the country's literacy rate increased from 66 per cent in 1970 to about 79 percent 'last year while the infant mortality rate declined from 39.4 deaths for every 1,000 births in 1970 to 13.5 last year.

He also said although social ills in the country had not reached the critical stage, early preventive action must be taken before major social, problems affected the children and destroy their lives.

These social ills range from child abuse, exploitation of children, the problem of vagrant children and sale of babies 'to youth problems like crime, alcohol consumption, cigarette-smoking and dadah abuse and mental problems and suicides due to the pressures of living and AIDS. -- more

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Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said Malaysia was fortunate as the children did not suffer from calamities like wars, earthquakes, typhoons, famine and hunger .

+We should be grateful as our children need not live by the roadside or be sold for their organs,+ he added.

All programmes involving children would be continued and, ... react in the last five years they have been intensified like the Hepatitis B and Rubella immunisation programmes, costing \$20 million, and poverty eradication programmes costing \$315 million, he said.

He added that Malaysia was also prepared to, cooperate at the international level to facilitate, world efforts regarding child- protection and development, especially in the less developed nations.

He later told reporters that the proposed National Action Plan would concentrate on the welfare of children, especially the poor and abused.

The government would also take steps to check the spread of AIDS in the country. -- more

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Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir is among 71 heads of government who have signed the Declaration since the World Summit Conference on Children in New York on last Sept 30.

The signing ceremony was witnessed by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Deputy director, Dr Richard Jolly, and a group of children.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir and Datuk Seri Datin Paduka Dr Siti Hasmah later cut a cake and distributed pieces to the children.

Present at the function were National Unity and Community Development Minister, Datuk Napsiah Omar, Economic Planning Unit Director-general, Datuk Mohamed, Sheriff Mohamed Kassim, children and parents. -- Bernama

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