

# Policies on children, youth to be drawn up

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. — Policies and development programmes for youth and children will be drawn up to reflect the Government's emphasis on these sectors as the country's most important human resource, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The policies, under the National Development Plan, would place emphasis on the physical, mental and spiritual development of children with special attention on the disadvantaged or unfortunate, Dr Mahathir said.

Children represent every family's and the country's wealth and special care and attention need to be taken to protect this "highly vulnerable asset", Dr Mahathir said.

Speaking at the signing of the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and

Development of Children at the Putra World Trade Centre here, he said: "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."

"Malaysia on its part will prepare a National Action Plan before the end of the year to implement the commitments contained in the declaration signed today," he said.

The signing ceremony was witnessed by Unicef deputy executive director Dr Richard Jolly, Education Minister Datuk Sulaiman Daud, National Unity and Social Development Minister Datuk Napsiah Omar, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Syed Hamid Albar and Economic Planning Unit director-general Datuk Mohamed Sheriff Mohamed Kassim.

Dr Mahathir and his wife, Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah, later cut a cake and distributed them to the children who had gathered there for the ceremony.

The Prime Minister said the country's literacy rate had increased from 66 per cent in 1970 to about 79 per cent last year.

He said although social ills in the country had not reached the critical stage, early preventive action was necessary before major social problems affected the children and destroyed their lives.

He cited child abuse, exploitation of children, the problem of street children, sale of babies, juvenile delinquency, cigarette-smoking, dadah abuse and AIDS as some of the problems which Malaysian children and youth need to be protected from.