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POVERTY IS NOT FATED, SAYS MAHATHIR

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KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 13 (Bernama) -- The government always helps the poor to improve their living standard as it does not believe that poverty is fated, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

It was on this basis that the government had been striving to train and educate the poor so that they could lead a more secure life.

+If they remain poor and do not want to work after all efforts' and help have been extended, then only can we say that this is fate,+ he told the Dewan Rakyat.

He said this when replying to a supplementary question from Datuk Haji Mohamad Abu Bakar Rautin Ibrahim (BN-Kuala Kedah) who wanted to know the basis of the government's Development Programme for the Very Poor (PPRT).

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir cited the example of a hostel fire a few years ago where several students died because fire prevention measures were not adopted. --more

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The number of students staying in the hostel was above the permissible limit and they were even allowed to cook there but when many perished in the fire, some said it was fate.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said if efforts had been made to ensure that conditions at the hostel were good and orderly, many could have been saved even if it were fated that fire was to break out there.

He added: +It is not consistent with Islamic teachings if we do not make an effort but, instead put the blame on God because Islam encourages its followers to strive to improve their well-being.

+We do not want to subscribe to the belief that fate is behind our misfortune without making efforts to rectify the situation. +

To the original question from Datuk Haji Mohamad Abu Bakar, he said the government had spent \$345.8 million on the PPRT which had benefited 52,128 families. -- more

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The Prime Minister said the Orang Asli community was also covered by the programme but different projects and assistance were given to them to suit their socio-cultural characteristics.

To a **supplementary question** from Encik Ahmad Nor (DAP-Bayan Baru), he said the types of assistance given under the programme were cheap houses and opportunities to carry out petty trading and agricultural activities.

The programme had resulted in many of the participants enjoying a better standard of living, he added. -- Bernama