

PM: Joint efforts can help fight poverty

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and Ravi Nambiar

JOHOR BARU, Sat. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said efforts to help the poor and handicapped uplift their livelihood should include the streamlining of assistance from government agencies and voluntary organisations.

The Prime Minister said such co-ordinated efforts can effectively help enhance the living standards of the poor and the handicapped. The move would also complement other poverty eradication programmes.

Speaking at the launching of the Johor Baru City Foundation — the first large scale organisation formed with the aim of eradicating poverty within a specific area — Dr Mahathir urged agencies and voluntary bodies to joint forces, co-ordinate efforts and ideas to ensure the success of their objectives.

All of them have the same intention — that is to alleviate the sufferings of the poor and handicapped, he said.

He added that corporate bodies could play a major role in getting this implemented.

Dr Mahathir later struck a gong three times to launch the foundation and accepted donations on behalf of the foundation. The donation would be used to help the poor and handicapped.

Donations totalling more than RM3.3 million were received today. They include cheques of RM1 million each from the Johor Government and the Johor Baru City Council. The private sector contributed the remaining RM1.3 million.

Dr Mahathir also handed over assistance to those chosen by the foundation to receive aid.

The Prime Minister said studies carried out in Malaysia and other countries have proven that social problems such as dadah addiction, alcoholism, prostitution, dropping out from schools and child abuse have been attributed to poverty and lack of education and religious belief.

He said many under-developed and remote areas

become nests for dadah addicts while the lack of space in small houses force some children to leave their homes seeking peace or entertainment.

But the Government's poverty eradication programmes has helped to indirectly reduce these ills.

He congratulated the Johor Government for their foresight and planning in establishing a foundation to uplift the living standards of the poor within the city.

He said poverty in Malaysia is not very serious and the people should be thankful that their leaders, the administration and society have always shown care for the less fortunate.

He hoped the foundation would identify specific forms of assistance — physical and spiritual — to ensure that people would not become over-dependent on hand-outs.

Menteri Besar Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, in his speech, said while the State

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Muhyiddin: Don't forget the handicapped

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capital marches towards industrialisation, the people should not forget those who are poor, handicapped or stricken with illness.

He said the State Govern-

ment established the foundation and encouraged the private sector to contribute manpower, finance and ideas to help overcome the problems.

He said even though several programmes have been

introduced including the development programmes for the hardcore poor, the projects are solely implemented by the Government and the involvement of the private sector and the public is negligible.