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Mahathir-Diving

COASTAL RESOURCES SHOULD BE PROTECTED, SAYS PM

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 17 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad says coastal resources should be protected from those who seek immediate and short term gains which must in the long run cause irreparable damage and loss.

"This is because the government realises that managing the coastal resources on a sustainable basis is crucial for the long term well-being of this country," he said at a dinner in conjunction with the Diving Equipment and Marketing Association (DEMA) Expo '96 at Putra World Trade Centre tonight.

He said a National Policy for the Management of Coastal Resources has been formulated by the Economic Planning Unit in the Prime Minister's Department.

The Prime Minister said most ministries also have an environmental division to oversee all environmental issues related to their roles and functions.

It was hoped that the environmental awareness among policy-makers, decision-makers and implementors of various projects would help in the development of eco-friendly projects, he said.

In this context, he said, he was glad to note that the private sector has been receptive to the needs of environmental conservation and it is common for major developers to have an in-house environmental consulting division.

Dr Mahathir said project developers could rest assured that their environmentally friendly projects would get all the necessary approval and start as scheduled.

They could also minimise court litigation and payment of compensation.

He said economic development should always take into consideration the various aspects of human and natural resources development as all major development projects in the country need an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).

"The EIA considers social as well as physical, biological and chemical impacts on the environment. The implementation of EIA's procedures has managed to reduce risk to the developer and at the same time help preserve the environment," he said.

"The Malaysia Incorporated approach is our way of promoting cooperation between the public and the private sector and the non-governmental organisations involved directly or indirectly in the implementation of projects."

In the case of marine environment and resources, he said, the government's intention is to protect, develop and manage without entirely negating the economic and recreational potentials.

"To be worthwhile, beauty must not just be preserved but it must also be enjoyed by the greatest number of people.

"Beauty that is totally hidden from view is meaningless, worse than an abstraction as it is like music to the deaf or light to the blind," he added.

With current efforts focused on developing the rich and beautiful marine life, he pointed out, it was only to be expected that the number of deep sea divers should increase. Currently, there are about 10,000 recreational divers in the country.

He hoped that DEMA Asia '96 would serve as a positive model to

stimulate the diving equipment industry while at the same time create awareness among the public on the need to protect and conserve the environment. -- BERNAMA

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