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Mahathir - Bakun

EVERY DEVELOPMENT INVOLVES SOME SACRIFICE- DR MAHATHIR

By: Ali Mamat and Syed Jamil Jaafar

WELLINGTON, March 26 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today there are times when some sacrifice has to be made in the interests of development and the wellbeing of the people.

However such sacrifice would not necessitate the total destruction of the environment as made out by certain Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO), he said.

"We'll preserve the environment. At the same time we should give priority to the people's wellbeing so that they too will achieve progress like the peoples of developed countries," he said when replying to several questions during a meeting with some 200 Malaysians including students studying in New Zealand, at the Malaysian High Commission here.

The Prime Minister, who is on a four-day visit to this country, gave an assurance that at least 70 per cent of Malaysia's surface would remain covered in greenery including 50 per cent with virgin forests and 20 per cent with crops such as rubber and oil palm.

He said claims by certain NGOs that the government had destroyed the way of life of Sarawak's Penan community with the construction of the Bakun Hydro-electricity Dam project was nonsense and deliberately created so that the community would remain backward.

It was clear some NGOs, which were being made use of by certain developed countries, preferred to see the Penans continuing to use blow pipes and hunt monkeys in the jungle for a living rather than be involved in the mainstream of national development, Dr Mahathir said.

Malaysia needed cheap source of power like the one which would be supplied by the Bakun Dam to speed up industrial growth and realisation of Vision 2020, he said.

Replying to another question, Dr Mahathir said a caring Malaysian society could only be created if the various communities were attentive to each other and not merely expect the government to be caring towards the people.

During the meeting which lasted about two hours, Dr Mahathir also answered questions about the dadah problem, the position of Mara scholars, the future of the English Language in Malaysia and balancing spiritual and material development.

Earlier the Prime Minister called on New Zealand's Governor- General Sir Michael Hardie Boys at Government House. Tonight Dr Mahathir will attend an informal dinner hosted by his New Zealand counterpart Jim Bolger at his official residence at Premier House here. -- BERNAMA

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