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Mahathir-Marine

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION PROGRAMME MUST BE SUSTAINABLY FINANCED

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 2 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said tonight the country's resource protection programme, including the preservation of marine parks, should be sustainably financed.

"It is of utmost important that our resource protection programme is sustainably financed because a failure of such nature could set back years of diligent effort and achievement," he said in his speech at a fund raising dinner for the Marine Parks and Marine Reserves Trust Fund here.

His speech for the event which was entitled "Our Seas...Our Children Legacy" was delivered by Agriculture Minister Datuk Amar Dr Sulaiman Daud. Dr Mahathir is overseas on a two-week official visit from Sept 25 to Latin American countries including Cuba, Chile, Uruguay and Argentina.

However, he said such programme in Malaysia would not face that kind of failure since the private sector always back the government effort to protect the environment.

"It is heartening to note that because of the generosity of our private sector, our resource protection programme will not suffer from lack of funds," he added.

He said that the private sector's donation was much appreciated by the government as it could be utilised for management, education, research and training activities as well as for public amenities in the parks.

"The smart partnership between the private sector and public agencies is working very well in the country because of the conducive government policy that promotes such partnerships," he said.

Dr Mahathir said one of such incentive is where the contributors could get tax exemption for their contribution to the Fund.

He said the establishment of the Fund in 1985 had enabled the private sector as well as individuals to contribute towards the conservation of marine environment.

He stressed that the tropical water in Malaysia, with its rich biodiversity, should be conserved and managed in order to sustain the fisheries and eco-tourism industries.

"The establishment of marine parks has certainly benefited the fishermen, because the breeding and foraging habitat of the fishes is protected," he said.

At the moment, five marine parks had been gazetted namely Pulau Payar Marine Park (Kedah), Pulau Redang Marine Park (Terengganu), Pulau Tioman Marine Park (Pahang), Mersing Marine Park (Johor) and Labuan Marine Park (Federal Territory of Labuan).

Dr Mahathir also said that education programme was the government's priority in increasing environmental awareness particularly among the school children.

He said children as the future custodian of the marine environment should be informed as much as possible on the delicate ecosystem of the marine environment.

The dinner was held in conjunction with the four-day Diving Equipment and Marketing Association (Dema) Asia '97 Expo and Conference which started today.

Also present at the dinner were Prime Minister's wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali and Malaysian Sport Diving Association (MSDA) president Mukhriz Mahathir. Both events were jointly organised by Dema, MSDA and Department of Fisheries. -- BERNAMA

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