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Minimal highland development (HL)

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GENTING HIGHLANDS, Fri. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today told environmental pressure groups not to adopt a fanatical approach on the development of the country's highlands.

Dr Mahathir said it was the right of every Malaysian to tap the potential of the highlands and to enjoy the temperate climate and scenic views.

In this regard, the Prime Minister added that the Government would allow minimal development at the highlands.

Dr Mahathir said the proposed highway linking Genting Highlands, Fraser's Hill and Cameron Highlands would be built to allow Malaysians to enjoy their temperate climate and scenic surroundings but it would be done with minimal damage to the environment.

He said the Government would have to allow developments in the highlands so that all Malaysians, whether young or old, would be able to reach the places.

"We don't want to be merely told that there are places in Malaysia with such temperate climate and natural beauty when we can actually enjoy all these things.

"It's like telling a child that ice cream is delicious, but he cannot taste it ... it can be frustrating."

The Prime Minister said Malaysians who could not afford to visit countries with cool climates including those in Europe, could enjoy the same climate in the Malaysian highlands.

"The Government believes that we should enjoy what our own nature provides," he said when speaking at the launching of the world's fastest mono cable car system, "The Genting Skyway" which links Gohtong Jaya to Highlands Hotel, Resorts World Berhad's newest hotel situated 2,000 metres above sea-level.

Also present were the Prime Minister's wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, Pahang Menteri Besar Tan Sri Mohammad Khalil Yaakob, Resorts World Bhd chairman Tan Sri Lim Goh Tong, several Ministers and Deputy Ministers.

Dr Mahathir said although not all non-governmental organisations were totally against development, there were those who adopted a fanatical stand.

He said the highlands must be developed because very few people could climb the terrains, adding that those who were old and unable (to climb) would have to use roads or other facilities that were built so that the highlands would be more accessible.

The Prime Minister said to build cable car systems and roads, there was a need to cut at least a few hills and trees.

"This is a sacrifice, but a worthwhile sacrifice. We should not cut down the trees and hills completely. We must minimise cutting," he said.

Dr Mahathir said it was the Government's intention to build a highway linking the three highlands on the Main Range so that these places could be easily reached by people who seek a temperate climate and nature for their holidays.

"We will do it (the highway) with minimum damage."

However, Dr Mahathir said there were those, especially some NGOs, who were totally against such development.

The Prime Minister likened this to having money but not being able to

spend it.

"I hope those of us who are concerned about the environment would take a balanced stand and not a fanatical approach. Some are so extreme that we can't even chop vegetation for food."

Dr Mahathir said NGOs should practise what they preached, adding that there were those who spoke strongly about the danger of chopping down trees, but they themselves did the same when it came to building their own homes.

"In order to preserve the forests, are we supposed to live on trees?" he asked.

"I (would) like to see someone who has not chopped a single tree in his entire life," he said.

Dr Mahathir and Dr Siti Hasmah then took a ride on the cable car to the Highlands Hotel.

Later, the Prime Minister witnessed the signing ceremony to mark the handing over of the responsibilities of the Resorts World Bhd's fire and rescue services to the Government.

RWB also pledged to hand over two fire engines worth RM8 million to the Government.

Dr Mahathir then opened the 888-room Highlands Hotel, the latest addition to the chain of hotels at the highlands.

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