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PM: We care for all, whether rich or poor

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LAHAD DATU, Thurs. - The Government will not ignore the interests of the rich while giving priority to poverty eradication, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said businessmen who did well would pay more in taxes to the Government.

He said these taxes could be used to bring greater development to the nation, including improving the living standard of the hardcore poor.

"The rich are like the goose which lays golden eggs and we want them to continue laying as many golden eggs as possible."

Dr Mahathir said 28 per cent of every RM1 profit made by businessmen went to the Government.

He said taxes collected by the Government would not be abused but wisely used for the benefit of the people and the country.

He said the Government's objective was to ensure that all segments of the community from the very poor to the very rich prospered.

"The Government's policy is to assist the very poor, those who are not poor and the very rich," he said, adding that no one should be left out from the Government's development efforts.

The Prime Minister was speaking at the launch of a Hardcore Poor Eradication Programme involving the cultivation of 11,000 hectares of oil palm in Bagahak, about 50km from here.

The project, the first of its kind in Sabah, is a joint venture between State-owned Sawit Group of Companies and smallholders in Bagahak, which comes under the hardcore poor category.

Mooted by the State Government, the joint venture is expected to bring dual benefits - to generate revenue for the State and to eradicate poverty among the hardcore poor.

Under the project, smallholders are given the chance to own shares in this viable project.

The implementation of the project is expected to open doors for businesses, pave the way for infrastructure development and a host of other spin-offs in rural development.

Dr Mahathir presented equity certificates to 200 hardcore poor families who will be given four hectares of land with mature oil palm.

Congratulating the State Government for initiating the project, the Prime Minister said Malaysia is, perhaps the only country in the world which had formulated a comprehensive programme to assist the hardcore poor.

He said under the comprehensive poverty eradication programme, the Government built houses for the hardcore poor and provided them with opportunities to be self-reliant.

Citing the successes of Malaysians like Datuk Azhar Mansor, who circumnavigated the globe alone, he called on the people to be brave in facing challenges.

"Malaysians of today are no longer afraid to compete with the international community ... what others can do, with determination and hard work we also can do," he said to shouts of 'Malaysia Boleh' from the 8,000 crowd.

Among those present were Chief Minister Datuk Osu Sukam and State Minister of Rural Development and Entrepreneurial Datuk Nasir Tun Sakaran and other State Cabinet Ministers.

Stressing that the Barisan Nasional government had been fair to the people irrespective of their race and religion, he said communal-based political parties, such as the Parti Bersatu Sabah, should be rejected.

He said unity and political stability was only possible under the BN government because it had ensured that the interests of all the communities were guaranteed.

Dr Mahathir advised the people not to make a mistake in the coming general election by voting for a party which did not have the interest of the people at heart.

"If we choose the right government like the BN, we will continue to enjoy many benefits," he said.

After functions in Lahad Datu and Tawau, Dr Mahathir attended a closed-door meeting in Kota Kinabalu with Sabah Umno leaders this afternoon.

He briefed the leaders on the need for Umno to ensure a Barisan Nasional victory in the forthcoming general election.

Tomorrow, Dr Mahathir will be in Kundasang to flag off the 15th World Mountain Running Trophy.

He will deliver a speech at the national BN youth convention in Kundasang before returning to Kuala Lumpur.

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