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Mahathir-Social

STRONG CHALLENGES ON SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

KUALA LUMPUR, April 22 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said stiff challenges remain in the second half of the Seventh Malaysia Plan as the government continues with efforts on social development and the creation of a united, resilient, disciplined and appreciative society.

The Prime Minister said greater emphasis would be given to the provision of infrastructure facilities for education and training, housing, health, youths, women, families and community development.

The government will also improve the accessibility and quality of education, particularly in the rural areas, and expand higher education to meet increasing demands.

"In this connection, the government has increased the allocation for education and training to RM16 billion from the original allocation of RM10 billion," he said when tabling a motion on the mid-term review of the Plan at the Dewan Rakyat today.

He said the allocation for the National Higher Education Fund had also been increased from RM605 million to RM1.5 billion, and this would benefit 40,000 more students pursuing higher education.

Apart from this, the government would provide the Skills Training Loan Fund with an initial allocation of RM500 million to boost participation at all levels of skills training, particularly among the lower-income group, he said.

To improve the people's health status, the allocation for the health sector will be increased to RM3.4 billion.

Dr Mahathir said the use of information technology in the health sector would be expanded and the Comprehensive Information System for Hospitals implemented to facilitate health administration and management.

He said the current efforts to combat the Japanese Encephalitis (JE) and Nipah viruses were a lesson that could not be viewed lightly.

"The government has extended help to the best of its ability, but the responsibility should subsequently be shouldered by all Malaysians in line with the caring society concept," he said.

The Prime Minister said the government would also improve the standard of social services provided by local authorities, particularly town services, social amenities, town beautification and cleanliness, drainage systems, and flood mitigation programmes.

Emphasis will continue to be given to certain groups like lower-income earners, women, children, senior citizens and the needy.

He said the government would continue to enhance the role and contributions of women in national socio-economic development by opening up more education and training opportunities for them to join the labour market more effectively.

"The allocation for this sub-sector will be increased from RM3.3 billion to RM4 billion," he said.

To improve management of issues on environment and natural resources, the government will ensure that steps emphasising economic approaches be taken in order not to burden the country or jeopardise sustainable development efforts.

The Prime Minister said the government was continuing with its agenda of inculcating a positive value system by giving stress on religion, traditions and civics to speed up the creation of a Malaysian race.

-- BERNAMA

HS YBY