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`Donations a major source of funds'

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today contributions from the society could become a major source of funds if they are managed efficiently.

He added that the availability of such funds could also become a source of strength for the Muslim community in future.

The Prime Minister said infaq (giving alms for charity) played an important role in the Islamic social and economic systems.

Dr Mahathir said this when simultaneously launching the national-level month-long Beramal Jariah campaign and the Malaysian Islamic Economic Development Foundation's Amal Jariah scheme at Pusat Islam.

Among the components under the scheme, incorporating the use of information technology, are E-Jariah, Tele-Jariah, Auto-Jariah, salary deductions and caring corporate - all aimed at making it easier for Muslims to donate.

Dr Mahathir later received contributions from 25 companies for the foundation. Some donated cash while others contributed by way of monthly salary deductions of their staff.

Calling on Muslims to emulate friends of the Prophet like Abdul Rahman Auf who did not hesitate to use their wealth for worthy causes, he said the funds could be used to enhance the socio-economic standing of the Muslims.

"In Malaysia, the practice of giving alms and beramal jariah (charitable service) is widely practised. Despite huge allocations by the Government for charity, many institutions have been established that strive towards providing assistance and help.

"It shows us that the culture of giving and helping is not something alien or new in our society."

The Prime Minister said the implementation of amal jariah (good deed) programmes could help resolve some of the problems affecting society, besides giving a positive portrayal of the religion.

In his message for the souvenir programme, Dr Mahathir said the Government was sensitive to the well-being of Muslims in the country.

Thus, various facilities had been provided and programmes carried out to improve their socio-economic standing to be at par with that of the other citizens.

In turn, Dr Mahathir said, Muslims themselves should make the most of the opportunities for self-advancement.

The Prime Minister said he was convinced the campaign would generate deep interest and would spur Muslims to perform good deeds as encouraged by Islam.

The campaign attached great significance and divine blessings more so because it is carried out during Ramadan, he said.

"The move by the foundation deserves all round support as the scheme is aimed at enhancing the socio-economic status of Muslims in the country, especially the low-income earners."

At a Press conference later, Dr Mahathir said charitable service in Malaysia was better co-ordinated when compared to other Muslim countries.

"True, there are those who donate in specific situations but this should not pose a problem ... we don't stop them, in fact, they are encouraged. Sometimes people need funds for operations, we can't tell them to ask from this or that body.

"If we feel like contributing, we contribute ... that's our way," he said.

On whether a single agency should be set up to receive contributions and provide assistance, Dr Mahathir felt charitable service should not be too bureaucratic.

"When someone contributes personally, there will be some ties (with the recipients). If those giving out and receiving the aid do not know about each other, this close relationship advocated by Islam among its followers will not be formed."

On views that some charitable bodies were too cautious in disbursing aid to the needy and would rather watch their funds lie idle, he said those managing such funds had to exercise greater care.

"If they are too generous, they may be accused of not being thorough (in selecting recipients). Everything must be done accordingly, that's why sometimes it seems as if they are not giving out funds."

On transparency in the disbursement of alms like tithes collected by State religious authorities, Dr Mahathir said they would be asked to administer the funds accordingly.

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