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PM-ENVIRONMENT

MORE SHOULD BE DONE TO HELP DEVELOPING COUNTRIES GROW, SAYS MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, March 20 (Bernama) -- A lot more has to be done in terms of technology transfer, foreign direct investment and better terms of trade for developing countries to grow, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

This, together with a new international financial regime, would enable them to grow fast enough to overcome their internal problems, he said in his opening address at the Pollution in Metropolitan Cities (Polmet 2000) conference on "Sustainable Urban Development in the New Millennium".

Of late, Dr Mahathir said there had been much talk about reforms being more important than growth.

However, he questioned, of what use were banking reforms and best practices if the banks had no money and there was no business to speak of.

"These can only come if there is growth and if a certain laxity is needed in order to achieve growth, then we should not be insisting on growth-strangling reforms," he added.

Reforms at the international levels, he said, were needed to deal simultaneously with economic and ecological problems in ways that allowed the world economy to stimulate growth of developing countries while giving greater weight to environmental concerns.

He also said the future patterns of agriculture and forestry development, energy use, industrialisation and human settlements could be made far less material intensive, and hence be both economically and environmentally efficient.

Under these conditions, a new era of growth in the world economy could widen the options available to developing countries.

However, he said developing countries in Asia could not afford to depend solely on outside help to develop as the initiatives would have to come from themselves, using their own ingenuity, wisdom, available resources, regional cooperation and a lot of hard work.

Urbanisation, he added, was taking place at a very rapid rate in Asia but the region too had the ability to make development sustainable.

However, meeting essential needs required not only a period of economic growth for nations in which the majority were poor, but also an assurance that the poor got their fair share of the resources required to sustain growth, he said. -- BERNAMA

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