

29 OCT 2001

Mahathir-Water

PM SUGGESTS R & D IN WATER MANAGEMENT FOR DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 29 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today suggested the creation of a body representing developing countries tasked with research and development of water and waste water management.

The Prime Minister said such an organisation could be of assistance to developing countries in need of advice on water and environmental management.

He said there should perhaps be a policy governing the regulations and management of water resources in developing countries.

"We do not want to obstruct development but we must be careful and skilful in the management of our water resources," he said when opening the International Water Association (IWA) Conference on Water and Waste Water for Developing Countries here.

Dr Mahathir said developing countries could learn a lot from each other and could avoid the mistakes of some developed countries and also their own (developing countries) from being repeated by other countries.

He said the concern of environmentalists who want to keep rivers in their pristine state was appreciated but it was not always possible to do so in a country that was developing as fast as Malaysia.

"We need living space for our expanding population. The approach should not be through stopping development but through careful planning and due consideration for the preservation of supply and quality of water," he said.

Dr Mahathir said it was entirely possible to do this and the people as well as the government must bear the costs involved if the quality of life was to be preserved.

The Prime Minister said poverty was the greatest cause of water pollution and traditionally rivers had been regarded as a natural sewage system.

He said even though people were poor, they must learn to dispose of waste by other means.

"It is a problem of culture. If cleanliness is part of the culture of the people, then the pollution of rivers can be prevented," he said.

To underline Malaysia's commitment to water and waste water management, Dr Mahathir said the government set up the National Water Resources Council in 1998 to ensure that water resources would be managed more efficiently and effectively from an integrated perspective.

He said the country had already adopted river basin management approach and no longer perceive rivers alone and in isolation.

"Our main target is to improve river water quality while maintaining the flow rate at the required level using regulated dams et cetera," he said.

Dr Mahathir added that by improving the quality of water in rivers, more water could be obtained from downstream parts of rivers for treatment and to meet ever increasing demands for water.

Among the topics to be discussed at the three-day conference are sludge management, water loss management and human resource development in the water and waste sector.

It is organised by, among others, the IWA, Environmental Management and Research Association of Malaysia, Malaysian Water Association, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia and Murdoch University's Environmental Technology Centre of Australia.

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