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Mahathir-Economy

MAHATHIR: MALAYSIA EXPECTED TO SEE 3.0 PCT GROWTH IN 2002

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 1 (Bernama) -- Malaysia is expected to attain an economic growth of three percent in 2002, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

"We believe that we may achieve a growth of 0.5 percent to 1.0 percent in 2001 and for 2002 there is a possibility of a growth of about 3.0 percent," he said.

Dr Mahathir said he was confident that the country's economy would recover a little in 2002 and if compared with other countries, Malaysia's economic growth would be far better.

The prime minister made these remarks in the "Wawancara BERNAMA dengan Perdana Menteri" tv interview aired by RTM and Astro tonight. The interview was conducted by BERNAMA Editor-in-Chief Jaafar Hussin and Assistant Editor E.Sivabalan.

Asked whether the global economic downturn following the Sept 11 attacks would affect Malaysia's Vision 2020 target of becoming a developed nation, Dr Mahathir felt that the effects would be minimal.

"Maybe they have some effect but we hope that this is confined to 2001. As we already know that in 2000, we achieved better growth at more than 8.0 percent and we had hoped that we would grow in the same manner in 2001.

"But in view of the economic downturn in the U.S. economy and followed by the terrorist attacks, we could not achieve our targets. But we still think it is not as bad."

Turning on the unemployment rate after the economic downswing, Dr Mahathir said unemployment in the country was still low and "I feel we can improve the situation and unemployment would not be a big problem for us."

He said job opportunities were still abundant but the problem was that many of those who were jobless tended to be choosy and this caused them to remain unemployed.

Dr Mahathir said the Sept 11 attacks, which caused more than 4,000 deaths, had also affected foreign tourist traffic into Malaysia.

"If not for the Sept 11 attacks, we are confident that we would have attracted more than a million tourists each month. And this is a big figure because for the whole of 2000, the total number of tourists to Malaysia was just 10 million and this meant that there were less than a million tourists each month," he said.

Dr Mahathir said 12.5 million tourists were expected to visit Malaysia in 2001 and this high level of tourist arrivals occurred from January until the Sept 11 attacks when more than one million tourists came each month.

"This had caused the tourist arrival figure for 2001 to rise although there was a sharp drop in September while October also saw low figures with only 700,000 tourists. But the earlier months saw very high figures and this means there will be more than 12 million tourist arrivals for 2001," he said.

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