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Dr M should head infrastructure thrust

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Labour of peace, love for mankind

DID you know that 44 million people in Malawi, Zambia, Mozambique and Sierra Leone have an average life expectancy of 40 years?

Contrast this with the average life expectancy in the US, Canada, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Denmark and Japan - almost 740 million people in all - which is 78 years and rising.

Did you know, in the four African countries, for every 1,000 children born alive, 200 die before the age of five? The corresponding figure for the developed countries mentioned above is five.

The bottom one-tenth in the four African countries have an average life-span of 30 years, hardly any time at all to live any kind of life.

So many are struck down by cancer, heart disease, mental illness, emaciation by hunger, AIDS, river blindness, malaria.

If only they had better medical facilities, care, food and better incomes which would buy them something more than just half or quarter of a life, as the British philosopher Ted Honderich has described it.

Did you know that 2.4 billion people in the world (about 40 per cent of the total world population) do not have adequate sanitation, and that 1.1 billion have no access to water supply whatsoever from south Asia to Gaza to Africa?

I bring these statistics out to show their reality and how they weigh down actual lives, how they crush hope and how they deplete mankind. They are the essence of life and death above and beyond the words and principles of what is good for them.

What are we talking about when we speak of high sounding principles which result in the Killing Fields of Cambodia, the bombings during the Vietnam war, Bosnia, Kosovo, the Sept 11 Twin Tower deaths, revenge, more deaths and destruction?

We are placing ideology, of whatever kind, above humanity. Perhaps we should spend less time engaging in that debate and do something real.

The soft side of infrastructural development should be remembered for the hope and the means it gives to life. It is something which has not been sufficiently focused on in building a better world.

The United Nations system about saving mankind from the "scourge of war", the US invocation of liberal democracy and human rights, and whatever bilateral and multilateral arrangements for development - they all have not addressed sufficiently the need to supply the means of life.

Infrastructure development of itself will not solve all the world's problems, but a focus on it would plant the seed of hope, that something is happening which is for real.

The idea can grow if the benefits it brings are there for all to see.

In Malaysia, our development has been very real. Infrastructure has led the way and pulled us forward.

Its architect is the Prime Minister. He is the natural leader for a similar effort on a world scale.

It, therefore, behoves the Government and private sector to develop the idea Dr Mahathir has planted so that it can be realised to show the world that, when we say address the ills of the world to reduce despair, instability, tumult and terrorism, we are also prepared to play a lead role in bringing greater hope.

The start of the process would, in itself, signal that there is the

beginning of care and attention.