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Dr M: Malaysians can still afford proper haj

KUALA LUMPUR: Muslims in Malaysia can still afford to perform a proper haj without any obstacles despite the global economic uncertainties, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday.

He said Malaysians were enjoying a higher social and economic status although the cost of everything had escalated.

"Nevertheless, the cost of living in Malaysia did not shoot up suddenly, more quickly than an increase in our income. Hence, although the cost has gone up, the quality of living has also improved," he said in his message in conjunction with Hari Raya Aidiladha today.

Mahathir said the cost to perform the haj had not increased to the extent that Muslims could ill-afford to perform the religious obligation unless someone was really poor.

He said those who saved money in the Haj Fund Board (Tabung Haji) enjoyed additional benefits for their savings from the investment dividends made by Tabung Haji.

"It's true that profits from investments have dwindled recently. We must remember that there is no business that gives fixed profit continuously unless we practise usury," he said.

Just like the people reap huge profits when the country enjoyed sound economic growth, they should accept the reality that during lean times, their profits would slide.

"When the economy has fully recovered, the people will enjoy higher savings," he said.

Earlier, in **JITRA**, Mahathir took part in a function to hand over cattle for the Aidiladha sacrifice at the Paya Pahlawan abattoir complex.

He urged Muslims not only to think of earning the *pahala* (merit) when they perform the *ibadah* (religious deeds) but also to be aware of the problems suffered by others.

The prime minister said the *ibadah* demanded by Islam should bring Muslims awareness and realisation of other people's hardship.

"If we are not hoping for the *pahala* for only ourselves, it will indirectly transform (us) into noble characters," he said.