

Govt to study poverty level of minority groups

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A SPECIAL household income survey is being undertaken to find out the state of poverty and quality of life of bumiputra minority groups in Sabah and Sarawak.

"The first phase of the survey covering nine minority groups has been completed and it indicates that the incidence of poverty is highest among the Rungus, Sulu and Orang Sungai in Sabah and the Penan, Kenyah and Kajang in Sarawak," said Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

"In the peninsula, the orang asli are among the poorest," he said.

Based on this, the Government would draw up more focused plans to alleviate poverty among these people, the Prime Minister said when tabling the Mid-Term Review

of the Eighth Malaysia Plan.

On moves to cap the rising cost of development projects, he said the Government had decided that there would be no direct negotiations for projects unless absolutely necessary and only under exceptional circumstances.

"Contracts for development projects will be awarded based on open or restricted tenders because there are now many good bumiputra contractors and they must compete with each other."

On the country's improved infrastructure, Dr Mahathir cautioned Malaysians to be prepared to pay a reasonable fee for services rendered although the Government would provide support where it could.

"The installation, operation and

maintenance of these facilities do not come free of charge," he said.

On education, Dr Mahathir said the Government would introduce measures to promote competition among institutions of higher learning so that they would emerge as premier universities at par with Cambridge, Harvard and Waseda in Japan.

To increase industrial productivity, he said, the Government would support the establishment of trading companies ala Japanese *sogo shoshas* to become the conduit for the marketing of products abroad.

On tourism, he said Blue Flag and Green Globe certifications would be introduced to tourist sites.

"The Blue Flag is awarded to

beaches that meet international standards while the Green Globe certification is given to eco-tourism sites that adhere to environmental protection guidelines."

A National Botanical Garden project will be developed to showcase new investment opportunities in agriculture, apart from being a recreational and tourist site.

To promote the development of sewerage and solid waste management, he said, a Sanitation Commission would be set up.

On the New Economic Policy, he said the economic disparities between the races had been reduced.

"Actually, the relationship between the different races is far better today than at any time in Malaysia's history."