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REPORT-SOCIAL
GOVT'S EFFORTS HELPED IMPROVE QUALITY OF LIFE

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 12 (Bernama) -- The government's efforts in enhancing the economic well being of the rakyat has resulted in an all-round improvement in the quality of life of Malaysians, the Treasury said in its 2003/2004 Economic Report released here today.

Despite the anxiety caused by the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and the sporadic terrorist attacks in neighbouring countries, the report said that Malaysians continued to enjoy a peaceful, harmonious and stable socio-economic environment.

"The continued growth in the economy has contributed to the higher per capita income of RM14,343 in 2003 against RM13,683 in 2002. The purchasing power parity has also improved from US\$8,862 (US\$1=RM3.8) in 2002 to US\$9,390 in 2003," the report said.

It said that in achieving a more balanced growth and equitable sharing of wealth a total of RM2.56 billion representing a 36 percent increase from 2002, was expended for programmes in the rural areas.

These programmes include agriculture extension services and fertiliser subsidies, rural roads, electricity and water supply, rural health clinics and schools.

About 12,400 additional households benefitted from the rural electrification programme, while under the rural water supply project an additional 41,300 households were provided with potable water with a cost of RM99.5 million and RM102.4 million, respectively.

Rural and kampung roads were also upgraded under the programmes with the construction of 7,600km of rural and kampung roads, costing the government RM582.7 million in 126 districts nationwide.

The report said that the government had also addressed the socio-economic issues faced by the nation in the Economic Stimulus Package which was announced by Prime Minister and Finance Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in May.

It also said that in line with the government's objective to provide more affordable houses, Syarikat Perumahan Negara (SPNB) would build 150,000 houses for the low income group.

"A unique home ownership programme was also introduced, where armed forces and police personnel, widows of civil servants and single mothers who do not own houses, would be eligible to own houses provided by SPNB through a rent-with-option-to-purchase arrangement at a rate of RM50 a month," it said.

The report said that as at end of July 2003, 40 units of low cost apartments were in the process of being rented out while another 450 units were in the process of being acquired by SPNB from developers under the programme.

Touching on measures to address social ills, the report said that the government launched the National Social Policy last month to enhance social development by forging noble values at all levels of society throughout the country.

The government also said that non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have complemented its efforts in caring for the handicapped and the elderly, suggesting the strong presence of social voluntarism in the country.

"In recognition of their role in nation building, RM67.8 million was provided as financial support to NGOs to help raise their effectiveness in rendering services including welfare, caring for the disabled, family

development, haemodialysis as well as drug rehabilitation," the report said. -- BERNAMA

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