

2009/10/07

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KUALA LUMPUR: Life in Malaysia was better last year compared with 2007, according to United Nations' statistics. The country had a 0.829 rating out of a maximum possible score of 1 last year, marginally higher than the 0.805 it scored the previous year. Out of 182 countries reviewed by the United Nations Development Programme's Human Development Report 2009, according to the human development index (HDI), Malaysia was in the 66th place. Malaysia had ranked 61st out of 177 countries in 2007.

The HDI, a summary measure of a country's human development, measures the average achievements of a country in terms of a healthy life as seen in terms of life expectancy, access to knowledge which is measured by the adult literacy rate and the combined gross enrolment ratio in education, and the standard of living in terms of gross domestic product (GDP) per capita. Norway, Australia and Iceland were at the top of the list while Niger, Afghanistan and Sierra Leone were at the bottom.

Entitled "Overcoming barriers: Human mobility and development", the report was launched globally in Bangkok, Thailand, on Monday and here yesterday.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department, Tan Sri Nor Mohamed Yakcop, who launched the report, described it as timely as increasing globalisation had led to an escalation in migration.

He said migration had led to economic development where children of migrants had "moved up the social ladder in one or two generations".

He said the ease of migration had made labour increasingly mobile where nearly a billion people were on the move.

He said Malaysia's openness to foreign capital and labour was reflected in its policies and demonstrated by the presence of more than two million legal migrants, who made up almost 20 per cent of the labour force.

Nor Mohamed said internal migration, particularly from rural to urban areas, had also been a major driver in Malaysia's economic development.

"In 1970, more than 70 per cent of the population was rural. By 2008, 65 per cent of Malaysians of all races lived in urban areas," he said, adding that other than supporting internal migration, Malaysia was also keen on attracting reverse migration of members of the Malaysian diaspora.

He said there were about 350,000 Malaysians working abroad, many of whom were highly skilled knowledge workers.

Source: http://www.nst.com.my/Current_News/NST/articles/13ssun/Article/index_html