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MAHATHIR-BBC

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KUALA LUMPUR, MAY 12 (BERNAMA) -- DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR MOHAMAD STRESSED TONIGHT THAT THE GOVERNMENT IS NOT BEING NEGATIVE TOWARDS THE CHINESE COMMUNITY.

IN FACT, THE PRIME MINISTER SAID, THE CHINESE COMMUNITY IN THIS COUNTRY HAD DONE +EXTREMELY WELL+ DESPITE THE SO-CALLED NEGATIVE ATTITUDE OF THE MALAYSIAN GOVERNMENT.

+IN THE FIRST PLACE, WE ARE NOT BEING NEGATIVE TOWARDS THE CHINESE. THE WHOLE LOT OF THEM WOULD HAVE LEFT THE COUNTRY IF THE GOVERNMENT WAS REALLY NEGATIVE TOWARDS THEM,+ HE SAID IN RESPONSE TO A QUESTION POSED BY A CALLER DURING THE BBC'S +ITS YOUR WORLD PHONE-IN+ PROGRAMME.

ENCIK CHARLES WEE, A MALAYSIAN CHINESE, SPOKE TO DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR FROM EDINBURGH, SCOTLAND, ASKING WHETHER THE GOVERNMENT PRACTISED A NEGATIVE ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE CHINESE IN MALAYSIA.

HE WAS ONE OF THE NINE-CALLERS WHO PHONED IN DURING THE 45-MINUTE PROGRAMME WHICH WAS BROADCAST LIVE SIMULTANEOUSLY THROUGH THE BBC WORLD SERVICE AND ITS DOMESTIC RADIO 4 NETWORK AT 7.10 MALAYSIAN TIME (1110 HRS GMT). THE PROGRAMME WILL BE ON AIR OVER THE BLUE NETWORK OF RADIO MALAYSIA FROM 7.45 PM TO 8.30 PM TOMORROW. -- MORE

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THE OTHER CALLERS INCLUDED ENCIK SIEW POH ONG, A MALAYSIAN RESIDING IN LONDON, ENCIK CHARLES TEH, A MALAYSIAN ACCOUNTANT WORKING IN LONDON, ENCIK JAGJIT SINGH OF KELUANG, JOHOR, A MALAYSIAN IDENTIFIED ONLY AS ENCIK FOO RESIDING IN LONDON AND DR ROWLAND FROM IRELAND.

THE PRIME MINISTER ALSO REPLIED TO QUERIES FROM CALLERS IN SPAIN, GERMANY AND NORWAY.

TO THE QUESTION BY ENCIK WEE, DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR SAID THAT WHAT THE GOVERNMENT WAS TRYING TO DO WAS TO ENSURE THAT ECONOMICALLY, ALL THE DIFFERENT RACES IN MALAYSIA WOULD HAVE THE CHANCE TO PROSPER THROUGH THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NEW ECONOMIC POLICY.

+AS WE KNOW, THE CHINESE ARE HARD-WORKING, DILIGENT IN BUSINESS AND HAD DONE EXTREMELY WELL. IF WE ALLOW THAT TO GO ON, WE WILL FIND THAT THE CHINESE AND OTHER RACES WILL HAVE DIFFERENT ECONOMIC STATUS.

+IN A COUNTRY WHERE WE HAVE DIFFERENT RACES, THE FACT OF RACE ALONE IS DIVISIVE ENOUGH. WHEN RACE IS SUPPLEMENTED AND EMPHASISED BY ECONOMIC DIFFERENCES, WE ARE GOING TO HAVE AN EXPLOSIVE SITUATION AS HAPPENED IN 1969.+ HE ADDED.

HE STRESSED THAT EVEN IN A COUNTRY WITH A SINGLE ETHNIC GROUP, THERE WAS ANTAGONISM BETWEEN THE SO-CALLED LOWER AND UPPER CLASSES.

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DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR POINTED OUT THAT THE NEP WAS DESIGNED TO ENSURE THAT THE INDIGENIOUS PEOPLE (BUMIPUTERAS) HAD AS MUCH CHANCE TO ACQUIRE WEALTH AS THE CHINESE COMMUNITY.

ASKED WHETHER HE WOULD WELCOME BACK THE CHINESE WHO HAD EMIGRATED, THE PRIME MINISTER REPLIED: + NOT IF THEY HAD EXERCISED THEIR RIGHT AS A CITIZEN OF OTHER COUNTRIES. +

THE QUESTIONS ASKED BY THE CALLERS COVERED A WIDE RANGE OF TOPICS, INCLUDING THE INTERNAL SECURITY ACT (ISA), THE PROPOSED 70 MILLION POPULATION IN 115 YEARS' TIME, PREPARATIONS IN THE EVENT OF VIETNAMESE ATTACK ON MALAYSIA, BRITAIN'S RELATIONS WITH MALAYSIA AND THE GOVERNMENT'S EFFORTS TO INJECT ISLAMIC VALUES.

TO A QUESTION BY ENCIK CHRISTOPHER BELL OF SPAIN, HE EXPLAINED THAT THE GOVERNMENT WAS TOLERANT OF OTHER RELIGIONS AND STROVE FOR THE WELFARE OF THE PEOPLE ECONOMICALLY AND POLITICALLY. -- MORE

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+I DON'T SEE WHY OTHERS SHOULD THINK THAT WHAT WE ARE DOING HERE IN THE INTEREST OF NOT ONLY THE MUSLIMS BUT ALSO THE NON-MUSLIMS SHOULD BE SOMETHING THAT PEOPLE SHOULD WORRY ABOUT,+ HE SAID.

HE STRESSED THAT HIS GOVERNMENT WAS TOLERANT AND WOULD STRIVE FOR THE BETTERMENT OF EVERYONE, BOTH MUSLIMS AND NON-MUSLIMS.

HE EXPLAINED THAT THE GOVERNMENT STRESSED ON THE GOOD VALUES OF ISLAM AND THAT ISLAM HAD GOOD VALUES WHICH WERE NO DIFFERENT FROM THE GOOD VALUES OF OTHER RELIGIONS.

HE SAID THE GOVERNMENT WAS DOING SOMETHING THAT WAS NOT AGAINST THE BELIEFS AND FAITHS OTHER PEOPLE, ADDING THAT THERE WAS VERY LITTLE OBJECTION TO THE EFFORTS TO INJECT ISLAMIC VALUES IN THE COUNTRY.--BERNAMA

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