

We're not imitating the West: PM

By AHIRUDIN ATTAN

MALAYSIA'S move to industrialise, as envisaged in Vision 2020, is not to imitate the West but is driven by the needs of a growing population, says Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

With a population of 18.3 million people and an annual birth rate of 360,000, the country needs to generate some 300,000 jobs a year. Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said this cannot be possibly achieved through the opening of land for agriculture; hence, the need to industrialise.

The view that a market economy is the way of the West is also misleading, he told the With The Prime Minister programme telecast over RTM last night.

"The market economy exists in the East and in the West, and anywhere there is civilisation. The difference is that the West had emphasised industrialisation. But now in the East, and elsewhere, industrialisation is being emphasised. This is because only industrialisation can generate income opportunities for the people," he said.

Illustrating this point, the Prime Minister said a factory on an acre of land can provide jobs for 500 people. A padi field on the same acre of land can be tilled by one person.

"Thus, it is inevitable that we industrialise, not because we want to imitate the West but because we need to meet the requirements of our

growing population. Industrialisation, therefore, cannot be tied solely to the West. In fact, we are trying to emulate Japan, not the West," he added.

Earlier, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said Vision 2020 is a vision of a people who wants progress for the nation. He said he mooted the idea of a developed Malaysia only to convey what he believes is something the rakyat want to express. "I'm just the *lidah* (tongue)".

He said while the rakyat want progress, they do not have the means to make the desired impact even if they were to voice this out. "If the party

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that leads the Government does not voice out this aspiration on behalf of the rakyat, then the aspiration will not become something that will make an impact on policy makers.

"Thus, I was merely expressing something that I believe the people, not only myself, want for this country," he said.

The panel on the programme comprised Institute of Strategic and International Studies (Isis) Malaysia editor and senior fellow Rustam A. Sani, Kumpulan Utusan Melayu group editor Zainuddin Maidin, and UKM professor in the Economics Faculty Dr Ishak Shari.

The programme sought to tap the Prime Minister's views on the immediate and long-term impact on Malaysia and the people as the country forges ahead towards 2020 and developed nation status.

Social conflicts and problems which many fear will accompany the nation in its efforts to become developed are inevitable but can be minimised, the Prime Minister added.

"We know, from the experiences of others, what to avoid. We can draw the plans from now, bearing in mind that we will no doubt encounter such conflicts and social diseases.

"And if we are smart, we can make the rakyat aware of the dangers and what to do to avoid them, so that we will not fall into the same trap the West did, where acute social problems have defeated moral values and caused the collapse of the family institution, and others," he said.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said this is why Vision 2020 has defined the developed nation status not purely in terms of per capita income and industrialisation but also in terms of high moral values and ethics of the people.