

Former soldiers get assurance

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SINTOK, Thurs. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today assured ex-servicemen that the government would continue to provide adequate training to help them obtain other jobs when they complete their service with the Armed Forces.

The Prime Minister said assistance would be provided to enable them to venture into careers of their choice.

Since the 60s, the Government through its agencies and also the private sector had given priority to ex-servicemen in the relevant recruiting exercises, he said.

Priority was also given to ex-servicemen who applied for loans to start their own business, he said. He added that some ex-servicemen had succeeded in their careers and became millionaires.

Speaking at the opening of the ex-servicemen national seminar on development towards 2020 at Universiti Utara Malaysia here, Dr Mahathir said the dedication of the ex-servicemen and the training they acquired while they were with the

Armed Forces had made them better prepared to face the challenges.

"Some of the successful ex-servicemen did not even obtain formal training on financial and industrial management but they succeeded in their new careers," he said.

On his arrival at the campus, Dr Mahathir laid a wreath at the Dataran Perwira memorial which was built by the university to commemorate the deeds and sacrifices of the security personnel and civilians in defending the country against the communists.

Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, who accompanied Dr Mahathir, also laid a wreath.

Also present at the ceremony were Menteri Besar Tan Sri Osman Aroff, Armed Forces Chief Jen Tan Sri Yaacob Mohamed Zain and the UUM vice-chancellor, Datuk Dr Othman Yeop Abdullah.

Dr Mahathir then spoke on the targets set in the Vision 2020. He said the ex-servicemen's spirit of self-reliance could help realise

the objectives of the Vision 2020.

By 2020, the government will leave it to the individual to make use of the opportunities available then. As for the ex-servicemen, they would still be equipped with proper training so they could succeed in their ventures.

Dr Mahathir noted that the ex-servicemen in Malaysia were more fortunate when compared to their counterparts in other countries.

The government was able to help the ex-servicemen because the country's economy was sound, he added.

The political and economic stability of the country also made it possible for an ex-servicemen's fund to be established, he said.

Speaking to reporters later, Dr Mahathir said the government would study claims that 60 per cent of the 95,000 members of the Malaysian Ex-servicemen's Association were living in abject poverty.

The government would study the claims before taking any action, he said when

asked to comment on a statement by the association's vice-president, Datuk Zainol Abidin Johari, last month.

Zainol said that 60 per cent of the members were living in abject poverty and were earning less than \$300 a month. He said that many more members were doing odd jobs to survive.

"We do not have the figures of such ex-servicemen who are said to be leading an abject life and therefore we will have to establish why they are ending up in such a situation," Dr Mahathir said.

He said there were many job opportunities in the country as reflected in the number of foreigners who were out to grab these jobs.

"The foreigners are grabbing the advantage by venturing into business...some become taxi drivers.

"There should not be any problem for Malaysians to get jobs.

"Therefore we will have to study the claims why there are ex-servicemen living in such abject conditions," Dr Mahathir added.