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QUALITY OF WORKFORCE IS THE ROAD TO ECONOMIC SUCCESS, SAYS MAHATHIR

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KUALA LUMPUR, May 31 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the quality of the workforce is essentially the decisive element in a country's road to economic success and prosperity.

"Improving the quality of the workforce is, in a nutshell, what human resource development (HRD) is all about," he said when opening the German-Malaysian Institute, a joint venture between the Malaysian government and the Federal Republic of Germany, here.

Dr Mahathir said the government placed strong emphasis on HRD "because of our belief that the population represents our ultimate resource."

Under the Sixth Malaysia Plan, about 13 per cent of the federal government development budget was allocated for education and training, he added.

This was a relatively high proportion of development expenditure, and compared favourably with all international standards, he said. -- more
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Dr Mahathir said apart from the government, the education and training of the country's workforce involved many players such as the employers, workers, schools, training institutions, unions and even parents.

"Skill development is, however, very often perceived as the domain and responsibility of the government", he added.

He said workers too must realise their own HRD responsibilities.

"If our workers are to adapt to the new work environment, they must begin to play their part in materialising that training culture," he said.

Dr Mahathir said workers should seek to improve their standard of living not through simply demanding higher wages but through improving their productivity.

Productivity came not only through the use of more capital, better work organisations and proper work attitudes but more importantly by workers and their employers investing in skill development. -- more

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Even as developing countries like Malaysia continue to emphasise the importance of cost competitiveness and the need to promote productivity through hard work and sacrifices, there were attempts by some to link trade with international labour standards, Dr Mahathir said.

"If these attempts succeed, income for a few may go up, but most are likely to be unemployed. The disparity between the rich and the poor will be enhanced," he said.

He added that an integral part of competence was social competency, and this had to be emphasised because it touched on the core value system.

"The development of the values and the attitudes of the country's manpower must become a necessary component of all training programmes," he said.

Dr Mahathir said skill delivery institutions must institute greater collaboration with industry to keep pace with technological advances in industry and their corresponding manpower needs.

This was necessary as recent findings in many developed industrialised countries revealed that nearly half of the skill of technical workers became obsolete within three to seven years of formal education and training. -- more

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This phenomenon, largely due to the rapidity of technological change, had resulted in rapidly changing job content, he said.

Dr Mahathir said the setting up of the German-Malaysian Institute (GMI) came at a very fortuitous period of Malaysia's economic history.

"The opening of GMI represents another milestone in our continuing effort to invest in human capital formation in order to realise higher levels of economic growth and human development," he added.

Later, speaking to reporters, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia welcomed more such institutions to be set up here on joint venture basis.

This was in line with the government's move to make Malaysia a centre for education.

Dr Mahathir said he had discussed with Germany's Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development Carl-Dieter Spranger, who was present at the ceremony, about the possibility of having twinning programmes between Malaysian and German universities and institutions of higher learning.

Spranger told reporters that his government would study the request. --

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