

PM's New Year message also cautions against inflation

Tackle our social ills

By Ahmad A. Talib

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today asked the people to rally around the Government to overcome the country's social problems, increase productivity and counter inflation.

The Prime Minister said the full participation of the people in many of the Government's development programmes would help improve the nation's stability and contribute towards its continued prosperity.

Dr Mahathir said this in a New Year message which was aired over RTM and TV3 tonight.

"We went through 1994 without any major disasters. But the year also saw us coming face to face with the *lepak* and *boh-sia* issues, while the *dadah* problem is still with us.

"But generally, Malaysia continues to be peaceful and progressive, with the economy growing at more than eight per cent. We should be grateful for our good fortune."

However, Dr Mahathir said the problems facing the country should not be left unattended. The Government and the people must work together to overcome them.

Their control of the children's freedom is also weak. Parents should know who their children's friends are and where they spend their time."

The Prime Minister said schools too had an important role in shaping the children's culture and frame of mind. Therefore, the training and examples in schools should also include efforts to inculcate good habits and strong moral values.

He added that it was not the intention of the Government to stop youths from enjoying their life, but it wished to channel their interests to areas which were more healthy and constructive, and equally, if not more, enjoyable.

For the Rakan Muda programme to be successful, it would need the support and involvement of everyone in society, especially parents. While children were encouraged to take part in Rakan Muda programmes, the parents' responsibilities at home should not be neglected, the Prime Minister said.

Dr Mahathir said: "If parents have the 'we can' attitude, then it would not be difficult to convince their children of the same. Remember, the community which succeeds is the one which possesses and practises a constructive attitude.

He added that the Government was confident that these problems could be eliminated. "The Rakan Muda programme should be able to curb, if not eliminate the problems of *lepak*, *boh-sia* and *dadah* abuse," he said.

The Prime Minister added that the Government alone, with its financial allocations, would not be able to overcome these problems if there was no active participation from the people.

The Prime Minister said Malaysia was fortunate that the family institution had not crumbled as seen in the West, but there were signs that the parents' role in bringing up their children had reduced somewhat.

He said that this could be because both parents were working, but pointed out that youths affected by these problems did not necessarily come from homes where both parents were employed.

Dr Mahathir said: "The fact is that many parents do not give serious attention to their children's upbringing.

"Only a successful community would be respected by the world. The community which only knows how to speak well but is not able to show concrete successes would be laughed at and be looked down upon.

"For Muslims, this is tantamount to having their religion being looked down upon. Should this happen, there is no purpose in putting the blame on other people. One should blame only oneself."

On the economic front, Dr Mahathir said the country was doing well with its high growth rates. But he raised a note of caution by reminding everyone that even a developed country like Japan could face sudden economic decline.

He said no one should think that a nation's economic success was permanent and achieved by mere coincidence and by itself. Without proper planning

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Dr M: Curbing inflation key to lasting prosperity

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and appropriate policies the country's economy could never enjoy such good health, he said.

The Prime Minister also spoke of the threat of inflation, which could adversely affect one's high earnings.

Dr Mahathir said: "It appears that many people have still not understood this. Many people believe that having a lot of money means they are rich and that not having a lot of money means they are poor.

"That is why many people work towards getting more money without paying attention to purchasing power. That is why demands for higher income have never ceased with little attention to its effect on rising cost of living, that is, inflation.

"It is unfortunate that rising cost of living affects those from the middle and lower income groups rather than the higher income sector. Without giving due attention to inflation, they would be pressing for higher wages to make up for their loss of purchasing power.

This will result in higher inflation while the purchasing power shows no real increase...a trading nation like Malaysia will not be able to compete internation-

ally if the prices of the goods it produces are high.

"Industries and businesses will lose. Investments will drop. Workers may have to be retrenched and the unemployed remain jobless. This is why Europe shows unemployment of between 10 and 20 per cent. Their wages are too high, and they are unwilling to bring it down."

The Prime Minister said many executives in the country demanded high salaries and moved on to other firms if their demands were not met. Many workers demanded wage increases and more bonuses without taking into account their firm's business performance.

Increased wages should not be a problem if this was accompanied by improved productivity. Increased wages without an appropriate and corresponding increase in productivity would give rise to inflation and this would reduce competitiveness and employment.

The Government has no bad intentions in its efforts to curb inflation. The control of inflation could not be done by controlling the prices of items alone. The causes of the rise in prices must be also controlled, the Prime Minister said.

These include the control

of wages for all categories of work. A salary increase of up to 20 per cent given recently to one category of workers was higher than the country's economic growth of eight per cent.

The particular industry may be able to provide such an increase but this could make others who may not be able to afford to do so to be pressured into offering a similar quantum.

"I wish to plead with all executives, trade unions and workers not to spend too much time thinking about their demands alone. They should remember that the country's present prosperity and low prices are the results of approaches and policies initiated by the Government."

The Prime Minister concluded: "Let us begin 1995 with a reminder that the peace and prosperity that we enjoy does not last by itself. One's happiness and prosperity depends on adherence to good values, an appropriate attitude and accompanied by sober actions:

"All these would help ensure a more lasting happiness and prosperity.

"On this auspicious occasion, let us be thankful and curb our desires so that we can have a more lasting prosperity."