

High-tech projects will create job opportunit

PM: It's for the peo

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By Farush Khan

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. -- While the Government strives for higher technology, it will never neglect its primary responsibilities to the people, especially in providing them with basic amenities, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said high-tech projects, including those involving the aerospace industry, were "not just for fun, but for the people's benefit".

He said that right from the day the country achieved independence in 1957, the Government had been concentrating on developing rural areas and eradicating poverty and had succeeded to a great extent in these efforts.

"If we want to say we cannot go into other areas until we have eradicated poverty, then we will not have electronic factories and so on and the country will lose out."

He said that to eradicate poverty, the Government needed money and to get the money, it must move towards industrialisation.

It was through these efforts, he said, that the Government could create job opportunities and provide higher income to the people.

"We do not give priority to Lima to the extent we forget our responsibility to the poor. In fact, it is for them that we are doing this."

"I have said several times that the country needs to change from industry which depends on labour to one which depends more on capital and technology," he said, adding that this was important to produce skilled and efficient workers who would be able to earn high incomes.

By depending on unskilled workers (*buruh kasar*), he said, the people's income would remain low.

"What the Government wants is to raise the people's income, not through strikes or demands, but by upgrading skills," he said in an interview with eight editors and senior journalists.

The 20-minute Press conference via video conferencing by Telekom Malaysia was held for the first time in the country. Dr Mahathir was in Langkawi while the journalists who were at Dewan Perdana at the Prime Minister's Department here. With the Prime Minister were Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali and Defence Minister Datuk Syed Hamid Albar.

Dr Mahathir said this when asked how the Government would explain to some people who might have the wrong impression that it was going too far into "expensive areas" when there were other areas in the country which needed attention.

To another question that Lima was becoming "an arms market" and that the money the Government spent on the "military toys for the military boys" could probably be utilised for other purposes, he said it was not an arms market.

"It focuses on the aerospace industry, but weapons for military aircraft cannot be avoided."

However, he said, the Government was concerned about the need for Malaysians to grasp this technology because if it was ignored altogether, the country would be left behind in this field.

"We do not buy toys as stated. Actually, they are not toys. If unnecessary, we will not buy," he said, adding that Malaysia, in fact, had fewer weapons than some smaller countries.

He said Malaysia needed bigger patrol boats now as the areas of coverage were wider than before.

"But if people from outside who came to see (Lima) and wanted to buy (what are being exhibited), what's wrong?"

However, he said, the exhibition was related to the aerospace industry and the Government was not concentrating on military equipment.

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Exploration of space technology will benefit nation

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He said Malaysia needed to explore the aerospace industry to ensure that it would not be exposed to various outside pressures, including in information broadcasting.

He said the exploration of space technology, which involved satellites, would help the country and its people to control information technology, without having to rely on others.

Dr Mahathir said satellite technology, in fact, could be turned into a "modern business venture" involving equipment 35,000 feet up in

space.

On Lima '95, Dr Mahathir described its development as tremendous, saying that it had been recognised as an international event.

"Some say it is now the fifth biggest airshow after Paris, Farnborough, Dubai and Singapore ... so, it is now not very far from Paris and Farnborough."

He said it became more meaningful with the co-operation between local and foreign firms in the manufacturing of aircraft components and light aircraft.

On whether a policy was necessary to regulate the aerospace industry, he said

the progress was already clear even if the nation did not have a special policy on this.

He said he was happy that local firms had acquired the skills in certain fields in the industry.

"Maybe one day we will have a special policy in this field."

He said the policy now was to see the rapid growth of the industry with more participation from people in the manufacturing and aviation sectors.

Asked about possible incentives to encourage private flying, especially among the younger genera-

tion, he said the introduction of locally-made light aircraft was a direct effort to reduce the cost of learning.

"I am confident many local firms will be willing to offer scholarships for this purpose."

The video conferencing was made possible following the completion of Telekom's fibre-optic submarine cable project from Penarak in Langkawi to Kuala Perlis in Perlis.

According to Telekom, the initial work for the RM11 million project began in October last year and was commissioned two months ago.