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Mahathir-Message

DR MAHATHIR URGES PEOPLE TO ADAPT TO INFORMATION ERA

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 31 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the people should be prepared to adapt their way of life and working to the information technology era, especially with the formation of the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC).

"But truly, we do not have a choice. The information era will force us to change our lifestyle and our way of working," the Prime Minister said in his 1997 New Year message which was aired over Radio dan Televisyen Malaysia tonight.

In urging the people to strengthen their resolve to work harder, Dr Mahathir said the mastering of new technology in this era of information technology will help boost their incomes and the country's economic growth.

He said the MSC, which includes the proposed Putra Jaya township and Cyber City, would be equipped with infrastructural communication facilities to enable various types of transactions via the multimedia, that is through audio, imaging, data and all other information.

The MSC covers an area 15km by 50km extending from the Kuala Lumpur City Centre to the new International Airport in Sepang.

"With this, the use of paper correspondence and cash will be reduced. Instead, all daily matters, government administration and business transactions will be done through the computer. Similarly industries will be using computers that can be linked world-wide." he said.

He said: "This will be the kind of life that will be first introduced in the Multimedia Super Corridor and then subsequently throughout the nation. This means that our way of life will change.

"Whether we are able to adapt to these new changes, whether we will benefit from them or not, will depend on us. The earlier we adapt ourselves and the faster we acquire this new knowledge, the better will be our future."

He said Malaysia has succeeded in becoming an industrial nation and is now entering an era of information technology, an era in which the workforce consists of knowledgeable workers.

"Will we be able to master this new information and a new work-style which is not labour intensive but one that is based on knowledge? Do we have the capability?" he said.

The Prime Minister said the acquisition of new technology was important to overcome the shortage of workers and to end the dependence on foreign workers.

Dependence on foreign workers was not healthy because it limited any income increases for the people, he said.

"For so long as we adhere to the old technology, we will be left behind, the way we would have been if we had continued with padi planting and rubber tapping. Whether we like it or not, we have to accept this era of information technology," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the government had set up many universities and new educational institutions offering courses on information technology and its application.

The workplace too would provide training opportunities for workers who were interested, he said.

The Prime Minister said this new knowledge was not difficult to acquire and in fact many Malaysians of all races had already mastered this knowledge to the extent of being more advanced than some of those in the

developed countries.

"Therefore there is no reason why other Malaysians cannot master this knowledge to the level that is required. We must have confidence in ourselves. God willing, we will succeed," he said.

Dr Mahathir also touched on efforts to eradicate poverty which has been reduced from more than 40 percent to less than 15 percent.

"In our excitement over building skyscrapers and towers, expressways, high class town and others, have we downgraded our efforts to eliminate poverty?

"Did we not create so many jobs that we are forced to accept foreign workers? Can we wait until we have totally eradicated poverty before we beautify our towns, clean our drains and plant flowering plants?" he said.

"We do not erect statues to ourselves, nor name places with the names of leaders," he said.

He also slammed non-governmental organisations which he alleged were deliberately trying to create situations to invite police action against them and then criticise the government for being supposedly undemocratic.

"Let us not use the misfortune of others for our charade. There are many more serious matters that need to be championed without deliberately baiting our security forces to take action, thus making this country a target of ridicule by some groups," he said.

In reminding the people of the importance of preserving unity among the people of various races, Dr Mahathir hoped that 1997 will be a more successful year for Malaysia.

He said the country had achieved many successes in 1996, like the launching of the MSC, Measat II satellite and Kriss motorcycle, the purchase of the renowned British sports car company, Lotus, and the first ever appointment of a Malaysian (Tan Sri Razali Ismail) as the United Nations General Assembly president. -- BERNAMA

MOK YBY