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Mahathir-ITM

ITM RELEVANT AND IMPORTANT TO NATIONAL INDUSTRIALISATION PROCESS

MELAKA, May 2 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the setting up of Institut Teknologi Mara (ITM) is not only relevant to the present and future but also very important to the country's industrialisation process.

The Prime Minister said that even though Malaysia would have many universities in future, including those set up by the private sector, the role of ITM would still be needed to provide the skilled manpower in science and technology.

"This role is very important because without such role played by institutions like ITM, I believe, the industrialisation process will not be that smooth and achieve such a high level as it is today," he said when opening the ITM Melaka Branch Campus at Lendu, about 25 km from here.

In this respect, Dr Mahathir said he did not mean to belittle the role of other institutions of higher learning in the country, especially universities.

If students enrolled in universities just to obtain degree qualifications in areas like geography, history and language then it would be difficult to produce skilled manpower needed in science and technology, he said.

"In this present era, knowing History, Geography and learning a language alone is not enough. We cannot hope to achieve rapid development with only these knowledge," he added.

For this reason, he said, training institutions offering courses in science and technology like the ITM is very much needed in turning Malaysia into an industrialised country.

Dr Mahathir cited as example when Malaysia initially voiced its intention to depart from its traditional agro-based economy to that of industry.

At that time, he said no one had confidence in Malaysians, especially the Bumiputeras, in producing sophisticated goods or operating machines and modern equipment because they were supposedly only good at planting crops.

But, the Prime Minister said that as a result of doing it over and over again and with the knowledge gained, the Bumiputeras were not only capable of producing sophisticated goods or operating machines and modern equipment but also producing supervisors and engineers as well as efficient managers and directors in the industrial sector.

"With this, ends the notion that the Bumiputeras could never acquire the knowledge or master certain skills. Today, the capability of the Bumiputeras has been acknowledged and this is due to the role played by ITM," he said.

Dr Mahathir said ITM is the largest institution of higher learning in the country since no other institutions have branches nationwide.

"As such ITM should be proud of its role in national development and industrialisation process," he said, while expressing hope that Bumiputera students would fully utilise their stay in ITM to acquire knowledge in line with the government's aspirations to produce skilled workers in science and technology.

ITM Council Chairman Tan Sri Abdul Rahman Arshad, in his speech, said that between 1958 and December last year, ITM had produced 91,287 graduates in various science, technology and management courses needed by the industrial sector.

He said ITM would continue with its objective to regain the integrity of the Bumiputeras in the politics, education and economy.

Abdul Rahman said ITM did not regard the presence of private institutions of higher learning within and outside the country as competitors but as complimentors, opening possible cooperation through twin programmes.

Within the next three years, he said ITM would have a branch campus in each state with the completion of branch campuses in Merbok (Kedah), Seberang Prai (Pulau Pinang) and Negeri Sembilan.

"Each branch campus now has between 2,000 and 4,000 students and we hope in future to increase the student population to 10,000," he said.

He said that to enable more working individuals to further their studies, ITM would open up minor branches in several districts for night and weekend classes.

He said ITM was aiming to become Centre of Excellence with the best courses and lecturers in the region. --BERNAMA

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