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MAHATHIR TELLS INDUSTRIES TO BE LESS DEPENDENT ON FOREIGN WORKERS

KUALA LUMPUR, May 6 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamed today told Malaysian industries to switch to automation and robotisation to overcome the shortage of manpower and dependence on foreign workers.

Calling on the industries to be less dependent on foreign workers, he said it was not healthy for Malaysia, with a population of 19 million people, to have one million foreign workers in the country.

While Malaysia's previous development plans had been successful in creating employment, it had led to labour shortages, he added.

He said automation and robotisation should be the answer to overcome the current labour shortages.

"Foreign workers may be docile today but if they continue to stay here, it may not be the same," Dr Mahathir said during a three-hour dialogue with local and foreign industrialists here.

During the dialogue, questions were raised regarding the tight labour situation, tax policies, the RM100,000 levy on foreigners who buy property here and low-cost housing woes.

Touching on the balance of payments deficit, Dr Mahathir said the solution was simple. "We have to export more than our imports."

He added: "The Seventh Malaysia Plan (1996-2000) is like a watershed period for us. We have to increase exports to the world market."

Domestic manufacturers should not target the local market only, he said, noting that in 1995, Malaysia registered a total trade of RM152 billion, making it one of the top 17 powerhouses in the world economy.

"We must look to Japan and to Germany, and learn their success in the ability to expand their exports with little population growth," he said.

Giving his vision of a futuristic factory, he said: "You start the machines in the factory in the evening, lock-up and in the morning the products are ready."

Malaysian workers were hardworking and easily trainable to handle new technology, he said, adding: "We need people who have the skills to supervise, maintain and repair the modern production equipment." -- BERNAMA

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