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Mahathir-Australia

PM SAYS M'SIA AND AUSTRALIA MUST GET RID OF MICONCEPTIONS

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 18 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said tonight Malaysia and Australia should get rid of any misconception about each other and help to correct the mistakes and prejudices of the older generations.

He said it was time for the two countries to look boldly ahead into the future and to proactively maintain contacts and exchanges, expand people and business networks and nurture cultural understanding.

This would help the youth, the corporate, political and business leaders of tomorrow to be better able to continue and improve on the relations between Malaysia and Australia, he said at the Malaysia-Australia Foundation (MAF) dinner in conjunction with Malaysia-Australia University Alumni Convention, here.

Dr Mahathir said more talks, dialogues or public forums with distinguished panels of speakers comprising academics, intellectuals, corporate and business leaders from both public and private sectors of both countries should be organised to exchange ideas and views, impart, acquire and share knowledge.

He said that through the fellowship offered by the MAF, some Australian postgraduates had come to Malaysia and avail themselves of what Malaysia had to offer in various fields, including journalism, and this would serve to create a better awareness and understanding of developments in this country.

Dr Mahathir said this would also help dispel wrong perceptions and prejudices born out of ignorance or exposure to slanted reports by sensation-seeking media or to those Malaysians who, for one reason or another, are disenchanted with their own country.

Despite the ups and downs, relations with Australia had been generally good and in recent years had grown stronger as reflected in the economic field where trade grew each year, he said.

Dr Mahathir said Australian exports to Malaysia last year were valued at RM5.3 billion, an increase of 14.2 per cent over the previous year while imports rose to RM3.08 billion, up by 28.2 per cent over the previous year, giving Australia a good trade surplus.

Malaysia remains Australia third largest Asean trading partner and is also Australia's 11th major trading partner. Correspondingly, Australia is Malaysia's 11th trading partner.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia was keen to be an international centre of excellence in higher education in the 21st century and he believed that Australia could play a role in helping Malaysia achieve its aspiration.

He hoped Australia, which has several good established universities and institutions of higher learning would encourage such institutions to open branches in Malaysia or to twin with local institutions of higher learning.

Dr Mahathir said the launch of the Multimedia Super Corridor, to enable distance learning, was another opportunity for Australian institutions of higher learning to participate in and help make a success of the project.

He said Malaysia had been one of the biggest single sources of overseas students in Australia and to date some 120,000 Malaysian students had completed their studies while some 12,000 students were pursuing their studies in that country.

He also suggested that local institutions of higher learning attract academics and experts from all over the world and set up the required

faculties and chairs of learning.

He said they should adapt to changes taking place around them so that they would remain relevant.

To be truly relevant, universities must stress research and not just disseminate knowledge without caring or knowing what the knowledge might be used for, he said.

Dr Mahathir said that for a country desirous of industrialising rapidly the role of research and development in institutions of higher learning was not just invaluable but was quite indispensable.

He hoped Australian universities which may be interested in establishing branches or twinning with Malaysian institutions of higher learning would appreciate the need for strong research and development capabilities.

"In olden times, universities were where knowledge was pursued for the sake of knowledge, we cannot afford that luxury now ... universities are costly investments. Ivory towers gleaming in rarefied air are things of the past and should remain in the past," he said.

He stressed that academics who never produced any academic paper as a result of their research, but were only interested in passing on old knowledge, contributed nothing to the accumulation of knowledge. -- BERNAMA

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