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Adapt to changing times, says Dr M

A. Kadir Jasin in Okayama, Japan

MALAYSIANS must be willing to adapt to the changing times and environment if they want to continue to remain the masters of their own country, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday.

The Prime Minister stressed that many things and activities could no longer be carried out in the old ways - ways the people were used to when the country was very much rural.

Speaking to Malaysian journalists at the end of his five-day working visit to Japan, Dr Mahathir said while Malaysia's population was on the increase, so was the country's dependence on foreign workers.

He therefore felt that the "kampung way" of doing things were no longer suitable as they were unable to meet the demand of the larger population and in overcoming the labour shortage.

Dr Mahathir said the two-month holiday and the working visit to Japan and several European countries had provided him a new and clearer perspective of the direction that the country must take.

The trip had enabled him to clear his mind so that he was able to look at Malaysia's position from the global perspective.

He said either Malaysians change with time by adopting more productive approaches to business, or they risk having the country overrun by foreign workers.

This was why, said Dr Mahathir, that he concentrated much of his time in Okayama looking at modern methods of food preparation and the promotion of capital and technology intensive industries.

He saw Malaysian traditional food preparation method as not being productive enough to meet the rising demands and did not guarantee hygiene and cleanliness.

For this reason, said Dr Mahathir, Malaysians who were involved in the food catering business should consider adopting modern cooking, packaging and distribution methods.

He, however, acknowledged that changing the mindset would not be easy especially when the Government policy at one time was to encourage as many people as possible to become hawkers.

But this policy, said Dr Mahathir, was adopted at a time when there was mass unemployment in the country.

"Now that we have achieved full employment, we should change our mindset. I am sure with proper explanation and with the co-operation of everyone, including the Press, the mindset can be changed."

He cited the example of an industrial-size kitchen operated by a Japanese company that produced 12,000 boxes of Japanese lunch a day within just four hours before they were consumed.

Asked what his next step would be, Dr Mahathir said he would discuss with the Cabinet and State Governments on ways and means of encouraging this method of food preparation.

He said either the country adopted labour-saving methods of doing business or it had to continue importing foreign workers.

Judging by Japan's experience, he said this did not have to be the case. Japan which had six times more people than Malaysia, had a much smaller number of foreign workers.

The same, he said, should also apply to agriculture. He cited the case of a 2,400ha farm in England which was operated by only eight people.

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