

30 AUG 1997

Mahathir-Message

COLONIALISTS WILL RETURN IF PEOPLE DO NOT SAFEGUARD INDEPENDENCE

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 30 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad tonight urged Malaysians to safeguard the country's independence failing which colonialists will return to control them either directly or indirectly.

The signs of such a likelihood were already there as could be seen how easily foreigners could cause the collapse of the economy by deliberately causing a fall in the value of the Malaysian currency and the stock market.

"If we are unwilling to face this challenge with a more patriotic attitude and hard work, we'll certainly be colonised once more," Dr Mahathir said in his message, on the occasion of the 40th National Day tomorrow, over radio and television.

"Don't think that once we are independent, we will be independent forever. If we do not strive to preserve and safeguard our independence, colonialists will return to control us directly or indirectly," he said.

The Prime Minister also wanted the people to be vigilant and alert to elements within the country, which could destroy all that had been built and achieved so far.

Dr Mahathir dwelt at length on the foreign speculative attacks and manipulation of the currency and stock markets which had chipped off 10 per cent of the value of the ringgit vis-a-vis the United States dollar in the last few weeks.

"What we have achieved over the last 40 years can be destroyed by them in just a matter of weeks. These rogue speculators had increased the number of poor among us and made them 10 per cent poorer," Dr Mahathir said.

He said all the achievements would come to nought if the people become influenced by the various claims and baseless allegations being made and if they adopted an extreme attitude over any issue.

"On the contrary we must calm our feelings, be rational and be willing to listen to explanations and hold talks to overcome whatever problem," Dr Mahathir said.

Like usual, the Prime Minister conveyed his message in a frank style, with clear and forthright language.

"When the rakyat become poor, the rich will also feel the pinch," he said, taking a swipe at the rich and wealthy, who according to him, were also attacking and causing the economy to worsen.

The Prime Minister had earlier warned local banks which were involved in manipulation, causing the Malaysian ringgit and share price to dip.

He said he could understand why foreigners were bent on discrediting the country but was very disappointed when certain Malaysians who had benefited from the country's economic growth, made possible by the government, seemed eager to see foreigners "blasting our economy."

Dr Mahathir said it was not easy to raise the living standards of the people or ensuring equitable distribution of wealth or achieving 8 per cent annual economic growth since 1988, in Malaysia.

"Equitable distribution of wealth was not done by taking from the rich and giving it to the poor. This was done through economic expansion and growth," he said on Malaysia's recipe for economic success over the last four decades.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia had attained successes which were never thought of when the country achieved independence 40 years ago. These included building Malaysia's own car, having its own satellite in orbit,

scaling Mt Everest, hosting the Commonwealth Games next year or having its own son become president of the United Nations General Assembly.

The Prime Minister, however admitted that Malaysia was unlikely to attain around 8 per cent growth this year as projected due to the speculative attacks on the ringgit and the share market.

He said Malaysia's trade deficit was expected to increase as more ringgit would have to be paid to finance imports due to the fall in the value of the currency while Malaysia's exports become cheaper to foreigners.

Dr Mahathir also explained the government's current focus on expanding the Bumiputera middle class society.

He said in many medium cost housing projects, developers were finding it difficult to sell houses to Bumiputeras and this had caused many housing estates to be settled by only one race.

"This situation is unhealthy," he said.

" If we can succeed in balancing the percentage of Bumiputera and non-Bumiputera middle class society, the stability of the country can be more assured. This will also help to speed up the country's development." he said.

On the 21st century, he said it would be more challenging due to the dawn of the globalisation era and sophisticated information technology and if people become stuck to their present methods, Malaysia would be left behind.

"Hence we must equip ourselves with all kinds of knowledge and the latest skills. We can acquire new technologies if we are willing to strive for it earnestly."

He also urged Malaysians not to forget the struggle for the country's independence.

"With knowledge of the history of our own nation, we can effectively plan for the future," he said. -- BERNAMA

AU AAM