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Debate 'great chance for reassessment' of blueprint

PETALING JAYA, Wed. - Participants today described the National Congress on Vision 2020 as timely and a great opportunity for a debate and reassessment of the country's blueprint for development into the next century.

Parliamentary Secretary for the Ministry of International Trade and Industry, Datuk Hishammuddin Tun Hussein said the congress was very timely.

He said this was because the nation's present prosperity and wealth had given the people new confidence and this allowed for discussion on sensitive subjects during the congress.

"Participants were able to discuss about wealth being related to race, gender relations, liberalisation as well as our weaknesses as a nation and as a society openly.

"I think this openness is a strength which comes with the renewed confidence that we have. However, we cannot take it too far.

"We might be talking about Multimedia Super Corridor, about total factor productivity and what not, but a lot of people are still worried about the price of palm oil and the price of groceries. The developed community by 2020 is really for the masses."

"But bigger and powerful countries are using issues like human and labour rights, environment issues and women's right as a weapon for their own agenda."

Hishammuddin said it was therefore very important for Malaysians to learn to articulate their own stand.

He was speaking to reporters at the second day of the National Congress on Vision 2020 at the Sunway Lagoon Resort Hotel. It was organised by the Institute of Strategic and International Studies, Asian Strategic and Leadership Institute and the Prime Minister's Department.

Participants included Menteri Besar, Chief Ministers, Ministers, Deputy Ministers, economists, policy-makers, academicians and corporate leaders.

Datuk Dr Tengku Mohd Azzman Shariffadeen, president and chief executive officer of Malaysian Institute of Microelectronics Systems Berhad, said since Vision 2020 was mooted by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, a lot of things had changed.

"There is a sense of change in this congress, a sense of movement from the first stage initiated six years ago. This time we can see a lot of discussions on implementing the ideas behind Vision 2020.

"We are no longer discussing what Vision 2020 is all about but planning for the next step - the future," he said.

President of the Malaysian Nature Society, Datuk Dr Salleh Mohd Nor, said the discussion during the congress was very wide, with a lot of new ideas being put forward.

"But more importantly, how do we translate these ideas into reality. A lot of ideas were tossed about but its implementation is not so clear cut and the year 2020 is not that far ahead," he said.

Salleh also said that each Malaysian had to follow up on the ideas contained in Vision 2020 and not leave it to institutions such as Isis to follow up on its progress.

"If we are convinced with the wisdom contained in Vision 2020 we have to address it individually," he said.

President of the Malaysian Aids Council, Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir,

said the congress was an exciting intellectual exercise but the real challenge was to find a practical way of promoting all the ideas behind Vision 2020 and pushing it to become more than just a thought process.

"I am very excited about this congress. I think it's wonderful that we have a vision for the entire country to strive for.

"How easy or difficult it is to achieve it is another question but the fact that we have outlined things that we should be aiming for always helps the people to have a better idea about it.

"Malaysians, in general, have taken this vision to heart."

Director of the National Institute of Public Administration, Datuk Dr Halim Shafie, said the congress revealed a certain consensus regarding Vision 2020.

"There were no dissenting voices to say the direction of Vision 2020 should be changed. What we have is an emphasis being given to the caring society concept."

He added that while before the people were concentrating more on physical development, now there was a lot of ideas being put forward about social justice and a civil society during the discussions.

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