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Mahathir-Relations

MALAYSIA KEEN TO RECEIVE EUROPEAN STUDENTS

KUALA LUMPUR, April 11 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today Malaysia is keen to receive European students, particularly British ones for study in Malaysia so that they will learn to appreciate Malaysian value systems and be more friendly when later they work in the British press or in the British Foreign Office.

"They might even learn how to understand and speak Malaysian English and I am sure Malaysia/British relations will benefit from this," he said at the joint meeting of the Malaysian-British Society and the British-Malaysian Society at the Putra World Trade Centre (PWTC) here today.

"We assure you our universities will be just as good. You can provide some of the teachers and the external examiners," he said.

Dr Mahathir said it was decided at the ASEM meeting in Bangkok last year that there was merit in European students in large numbers studying in Asian universities.

The Prime Minister said as Asian students studying in Europe learnt to understand the culture and the way of life of the Europeans, European students studying in Asia would similarly learn Asian culture and Asian ways.

He said they would then be more understanding and less critical of Asians and would contribute towards better relations between the West and the East.

However this might not happen as there could still be clashes of civilisations "but we can try."

"For more than a century Malaysian students have been going to Britain to study and this has benefited both Malaysia and Britain. Malaysia of course gained the kind of knowledge and skills it requires for its development while Britain on the other hand gained from the tendency of those who had studied in the United Kingdom to favour everything British, particularly the engineering students," he said.

"But beyond that, partnership between British and Malaysian companies should also do well in third countries. Malaysian companies are now testing the water in many countries of the South," he said.

Dr Mahathir said they had not done too badly but they needed greater skills and sophistication, so employing British engineers and other professionals was one way out for the Malaysians.

"They could employ Russians or Poles but there is a language problem. The British fortunately speak English and although it is not exactly the English the Malaysians speak, the Malaysians can understand the British English quite well," he added.

But a better way, said Dr Mahathir, would be for serious joint ventures to be set up between Malaysian and British companies, each side contributing its particular strength and thus enhancing the capacity of the joint-venture company.

He said clearly the scope for cooperation between Britain and Malaysia was unlimited and Britain (and the United States) have the advantage because language was less of a problem.

"Hiccups will occur but we have had two major hiccups and came out of them with better understanding and stronger relations, and we should be able to take future hiccups in our stride," he said.

According to Dr Mahathir, the Malaysian-British and the

British-Malaysian societies could obviously play a big role in enhancing the relations between the two countries and peoples, and purely business consideration should be supplemented and augmented by forays into other fields such as culture, education and even religion.

Dr Mahathir also welcomed participation of British multimedia companies in Malaysia's most ambitious venture - the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC), a testbed for real life experiment in electronic government.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia could not do this alone as it needed help from friends, "and British friends are the most comfortable because you have the technology and the skills which we need."

The Prime Minister later witnessed the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Mara and the British government for the establishment of a technical training institute to be known as the British Malaysian Institute (BMI).

MARA was represented by its chairman Datuk Othman Abdul and Britain was represented by its High Commissioner to Malaysia, David Moss. The BMI will offer diplomas, primarily in the multimedia field -- communications, electronics and information technology for up to 720 students in any one session. -- BERNAMA

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