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PM: Discipline will see us through (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, calling for strategic thinking and discipline among Malaysians, today asked the people to give the Government's economic strategy a chance to succeed.

He said he was trying to think strategically about the country's economic and financial market but has not yet devised a good strategy.

"But I know one thing. If we panic and we lose our discipline, we Malaysians will suffer. We may not recover, whatever the strategy we may choose to implement.

"But if we retain our composure and we are disciplined in implementing even a strategically weak plan, we will succeed if not fully, at least partly. And as we go along, we will make the necessary adjustments, and we will recover," he said.

Speaking when opening an MCA seminar on strategic thinking, he said the Government "is indulging in strategic thinking at the moment".

"We may come up with a solution soon. Give the solution a chance and, by the Grace of God, we will overcome," he told the 1,000-plus participants who attended the one-day seminar.

Meeting reporters later, he criticised those who took a negative view for the sake of being negative.

"In Malaysia, whatever we propose, there will be people who say it's wrong. For anything. If you go left, they say you should go right. You go right, they say go left. That is Malaysia," he said.

But he said he was now more confident that the strategy which is being formulated will be well-received by the majority though "as usual, there will be people who will just complain".

Dr Mahathir had received a standing ovation and rousing applause at the opening ceremony when MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik, in his speech, expressed confidence in his leadership.

Earlier, in delivering the keynote address, Dr Mahathir spoke about the strategies which have put the country on the development path.

Offering his own definition of strategy - "A strategy is a set of approaches towards achieving an objective" - he said a country can be developed in many ways.

"But I am not attracted to the passive kind. There is too much uncertainty in passivity," he said.

On race relations, he said the strategy adopted was "to make everyone a little bit unhappy with his lot by denying everyone some things which he wants" because it's impossible to give everybody everything.

He reasoned that at worse, everyone will gang up against the Government, a move which would bring them closer together. At best, they would realise that others are also not too happy and get some satisfaction.

"Whatever the reason, racial problems and antagonism has not plagued this country and hampered development since the 1969 race riots. Maybe our strategy was right, I don't know," he said.

On economic equitability, he said the strategy was the New Economic Policy which allowed for limited disparities (between the rich and poor) in a regulated free market.

Communism and socialism which took from the rich to distribute equally to the poor, he said, had only made the country poor, backward and unhappy.

But absolute freedom in a totally free market led to extreme disparities and unhappiness.

"The NEP is as much a strategy for achieving political stability and to overcome economic and social inequities within the multi-racial society.

"All these are to be achieved not by a process of robbing the rich to give to the poor but by creating opportunities and training the have-not Bumiputeras to acquire the wealth and the social position which the non-Bumiputeras appear to be enjoying," he said.

In politics, Dr Mahathir said working together rather than fighting each other was the simple strategy of the Barisan Nasional.

But many countries, he said, preferred an "all or nothing" mindset which meant fighting and often destroying the prize fought for.

In summing up, he said "strategic thinking is very much common-sense thinking".

It focuses on achieving the target set, by the best route possible which may be the shortest or a roundabout path.

Lateral thinking, he said, was also essential to strategic thinking.

He gave the example of Malaysia's tax strategy which abolished taxes on luxury goods.

Yet government revenue rose because this ended smuggling and boosted profits of companies which paid tax.

"This does not hurt the people, does not alienate them, contributes to economic growth and increases government revenue. The approach is lateral in a very radical way," he said.

Giving another example, he said laws are notoriously incapable of forcing the use of any language.

But the language will spread if its speakers are successful.

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