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Mahathir-Mas

THE GOVERNMENT CANNOT AFFORD TO SEE MAS FAIL, SAYS MATAHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, April 2 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the government cannot afford to see Malaysia Airlines (MAS) fail or even become less successful than its competitors.

"The opportunity and potential for MAS to grow and become one of the largest airlines in the world is bright," he said at the dinner to mark the 50th anniversary of the airlines at the Putra World Trade Centre, here tonight.

"But the opportunity will remain just an opportunity if we don't know or don't want to capitalise on it. However, I'm confident of the efficiency of all the MAS staff and what is needed is only the dedication and the pride in your own organisation as well as the desire to make it succeed," he added.

Dr Mahathir said the success of the organisation would in itself bring benefits directly to the staff eventually, but on the other hand, if the organisation failed for whatever reason, the staff would also lose.

But, he added, if this happened MAS would not be the only loser, in fact the nation would also lose and put to shame.

The Prime Minister said Malaysian companies reaped good profits and the profits should be enjoyed by the company and staff fairly without affecting the cost of living and causing inflation.

He said higher profits, apart from distribution between the staff and shareholders should be utilised for investment particularly to expand its operations so that it could compete with international companies worldwide.

"But we must not forget that our success depends on cost control and the ability to curb inflation, for if we increase cost and inflation in whatever way, not only will our purchasing power come down, but we can also kiss goodbye to our luxuries," he added.

According to the Prime Minister, MAS profits were nothing compared to the massive investment put in and the low property valuation fixed by the government during its privatisation to help MAS.

He said if the government had sold MAS at actual asset cost, it was not possible at all for MAS to achieve profits but in fact suffer losses throughout as its profit level was low compared to other competing airlines.

"This factor should be taken into consideration by everyone because if we don't pay attention to the cost factor, we will suffer losses and the MAS' performance will deteriorate, and its plans to expand will never materialise," he said.

Dr Mahathir said so far MAS could still operate successfully because in the airline industry there was not much competitive advantage as the aircraft used by all airlines were the same.

"The same applies to airports, the only difference being the service provided and the cost of service. As such the schedule and service given to customers are important and we believe the MAS staff at all levels are aware of this," he added.

According to him, as is the case in other vocations, satisfaction could not be determined by income alone because job satisfaction was derived from the fact that the service given was something that one could be proud of.

"Only mercenaries are concerned with income alone, even then, mercenaries yearned for pride in the quality of their work, and I believe all employees including directors, managers, professional staff and those

supplying services and goods to MAS will strive for the success of the national airline," he said.

Dr Mahathir added that MAS grew and became more active since its transfer to the private sector led by Tan Sri Tajuddin Ramli, and the government's objective behind the move was the belief that management by the investors themselves was better than management by those who had no personal risk in the performance of the company.

"It can't be denied that since the bulk of the MAS shares was transferred to Tan Sri Tajuddin, the airline had achieved tremendous growth, and its future plans have been more ambitious.

"This certainly needs considerable changes in terms of responsibility, work scope and work culture because there won't be any change or recovery if old habits and work style are preserved and maintained," he added.

To mark the occasion, Dr Mahathir also launched Yayasan MAS, a charitable and educational foundation, which was established on November 27 last year to fund research for new emerging technologies and promote awareness and appreciation of the Fine Arts.

The foundation was also to assist the less fortunate members of society and to provide funds for research, development and educational activities in the pursuit of excellence.

It will be managed by board of trustees and to date two trustees had been appointed - Tajuddin Ramli and Haji Wan Awang Wan Yaacob, former Director-General of the Transport Ministry.

As the initiator, MAS itself has committed RM20 million over a period and hopes to raise sufficient amount or more through fund-raising activities. To date, the amount raised from the Launch Donors (General Electric Engine Services, Boeing Commercial Airplane Group, Rolls-Royce Commercial Aero Engines Ltd, and Pratt & Whitney) was RM1.6 million. -- BERNAMA

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