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Mahathir-Students

UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER FOR A BETTER FUTURE, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 2 (Bernama) -- Sharing his thoughts with a group of exchange students from all over the world today, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad advised them to grab the chance to understand each other to contribute towards creating a peaceful world.

They should be able to understand the different cultures and peoples by interacting with one another, the prime minister said in a teleconference from his office with the students who were gathered in Kanazawa in Japan.

"We are now moving into the information age and the world seems to be getting smaller. Whether we like it or not, we are going to be close to each other and if we don't understand each other, we then may confront each other," he told the participants of the Japan Tent, an annual student exchange programme held since 1988.

About 350 foreign students from 67 countries, including Malaysia, are participating in this year's week-long programme. They will get a chance to experience ordinary Japanese life through homestay with host families.

Dr Mahathir said that having a programme that brought students from all over the world together would help in efforts to develop a harmonious world in this Information Age.

An official said the students were given the choice to select a leader for the interview and Dr Mahathir was the favourite choice.

The participants, mostly university students, posed questions ranging from the flotation of the Thai Baht to the Japan Tent programme, Asean, Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) and foreign workers in Malaysia.

"The world needs more understanding between people of different countries and different races," he said of the Japan Tent, which had hosted 60,000 students so far.

By giving the participants the opportunity to meet at a young age, it would develop their understanding of people who were not of their own country or race, he said.

On Asean, Dr Mahathir said the grouping would not become something like the European Union which "intends to become almost a country like the United States with its own European parliament".

"We are different, although I cannot say that in a 100 years time we will not become a union but for the moment all we want to do is to work closely together, to develop our countries and when there is any political problem affecting us, it is for us to act together in order to give us a stronger voice," he said.

On the MSC, an American student asked Dr Mahathir whether he was familiar with the project.

The MSC being his brainchild, Dr Mahathir explained the initiative with ease, saying that if it was good, then it should be spread throughout the world.

He also said that Malaysia and the other Asean countries would be able to produce goods at a lower price for the world market if they get more foreign investment.

"As you know the cost of production in Europe is very high and what you produce in Europe cannot compete in the world market, but if the European companies come here and produce here, then they can reduce costs and be more profitable.

"At the same time, people who have a lower income can buy the goods. In a way you are helping to spread wealth throughout the world by investing in

a lower cost country like Malaysia and the other Asean countries," he said.

-- BERNAMA

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