

20/02/1998

Adopt new ways, Sabah Bumis told

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KOTA KINABALU, Thurs. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that the Bumiputera community in Sabah could become more successful if they were willing to adopt new measures for their economic improvement.

Speaking at the launching of the Institute for Indigenous Economic Progress (Sabah), Dr Mahathir said: "Bumiputeras can continue to plant padi and fish but there is a need to change from traditional ways of carrying out such activities."

He said if padi planters could combine small plots of land to make a larger piece, use machines to cultivate crops and introduce efficient management practices, farmers would be able to achieve greater success.

Dr Mahathir said if Bumiputeras were not prepared to change their ways, they would not prosper and would not be able to catch up with other communities who were far ahead.

"If you complain that we are poor and they are rich, it is because they (other communities) do the kind of things that can make them rich."

The Prime Minister said he was grateful that Malaysians were willing to sacrifice and were patient although there was an economic slowdown.

Among those present at the function were Indep chairman and co-founder Tan Sri Bernard Dompok, Chief Minister Datuk Yong Teck Lee and other Cabinet Ministers.

Later in Kudat, about 150km from here, Dr Mahathir said the contention that foreign investors had lost confidence in Malaysia was baseless.

He said now was the time for them to return as their investments would be worth much more in terms of the ringgit.

At the same time, he said, Malaysia had not really suffered any inflation, which meant that foreign investors could buy more ringgit and thus their investments in the country would amount to less in terms of their own currency.

"This is the right time for foreign investors to come in to invest with their own capital."

He said long-term investors who had set up factories in the country had actually increased their production capacity for export and the local market.

Dr Mahathir said those who had lost confidence in the country were the short-term investors and share market players who left Malaysia after reaping huge profits and moved on to another country.

He said the current economic problems were not due to weaknesses in the Government.

Dr Mahathir said there were people who bought shares in the stock market, pushed up the value and sold them off when the shares appreciated and thus made a lot of profit for themselves.

"Long-term investors have continued to have faith in this country. They have not pulled out and if they have to reduce their production, it is because the world market has shrunk and it is not because of Malaysia."

Investors who were able to produce goods which could be exported or consumed locally had increased their investments.

He said there were new industries which were coming in with very big investments and cited the information technology sector which had attracted more than RM4 billion worth of foreign investments.

"It is not true to say that investors have lost confidence in Malaysia," he said when officiating at the ground-breaking ceremony for the RM5

billion Nusantara Steel Mill project at Limau-Limauan in Kudat.

Among those present were Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Chong Kah Kiat and Nusantara Steel Mill chairman, Tunku Abdullah ibni Al-Marhum Tuanku Abdul Rahman.

Nusantara Steel Group is the first in Asia and second in the world after Hylas's Plant in Monterey, Mexico, to launch the concept of a mini integrated steel mill comprising a direct reduction iron and hot briquetted iron plant (Dri-Hbi plant and hot coil plant).

The Dri-Hbi plant is a joint venture between Nusantara Steel Group Sdn Bhd, the State Government and the Hylas's-Ferrostaal Consortium.

The hot coil plant is a tie up between Nusantara Steel Group, the State Government and the Danieli-Siemens Consortium.

The Nusantara Steel Group and the State Government hold the majority stake in both ventures. Other notable equity participants are China's Metallurgical Construction Corporation and Mitsubishi Corporation of Japan.

The mill which will initially have a production capacity of 1.3 million tonnes and eventually increase to 2.5 million tonnes will generate employment for 1,000 people.

Expressing confidence that the steel mill would succeed, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia and its people must demonstrate to the world that the country's economy had the capacity to continue growing.

"We welcome investors and I am glad to note the participation of foreign investors in this mill project."

Dr Mahathir said there must be some sacrifice from the foreign investors' local partners as they would have to come up with more ringgit to match the foreign currency investments.

"I think we should have faith in the future and begin to invest in anticipation of the country's economic recovery."

On the steel mill project, Dr Mahathir said it would have a spillover effect on the development of secondary and support industries such as transport and food production in the Kudat region.

Later, Dr Mahathir attended a kongsi raya dinner hosted by the Sabah Barisan Nasional at the Sabah Trade Centre in Likas.

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