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Mahathir-Workers

CUT-DOWN OF FOREIGN WORKERS TO CHECK CURRENCY OUTFLOW, SAYS PM

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 31 (Bernama) -- Malaysia can save substantial funds by reducing dependence on foreign workers and sending fewer students overseas, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

Admittedly the government could not stop foreign workers in the country from sending money to their home countries or stop Malaysians from travelling abroad, he said.

"In the past we have a lot of students studying overseas but now we have a lot of twinning of local and foreign institutions which has enable us to reduce the outflow of fund by students," he said at a dialogue here with port-users to promote Port Klang.

Dr Mahathir said the move to send fewer students abroad would also mean minimising exposure for them.

"At one time we thought we could let our people stay abroad for short space of time so they can have broader outlook, but what we have since found is that the cultures abroad have changed, they were no longer Victorian and now rather with modern outlook," he said.

"Like Tunku Abdul Rahman (the late first prime minister) said he couldn't recognise the Englishmen anymore. Not like the Englishmen he knew when he was studying in England. He said they all have long hairs with earrings. He found it was difficult to distinguish men and women coming from behind," he said.

Dr Mahathir said actually there were not much to learn about foreign cultures and as such there was no need for the people to spend time getting to know the different cultures abroad.

"In any case we have found that at least the Malay students when they go abroad they live among themselves, they don't mix with the locals. The modern Malay student does not go to pubs any more which is a good thing of course. But they stay together so much that they actually live in exported Malay villages.

"Apart from that they confine themselves to their own states. I know Kelantanese will stay with Kelantanese, the Kedah people will stay with Kedahans, and when they came back they speak the Kelantanese dialect. So we found that it was not useful, so we brought them back. It saves us a lot of money. Two years in the country not only reduce the cost of education but also reduce the outflow of money," he said.

The prime minister said the government had now gone beyond that by setting up more universities so that more students would get their higher education locally, except for those pursuing post-graduate studies.

Dr Mahathir said the government also wanted to minimise the use of foreign workers and as such the economy has been restructured so as not to depend too much on them.

"Hopefully when we are better off we rather invest in other countries to give jobs to these workers than to bring them here to work in low-paid jobs and remit their earnings back home. This is another cause of outflow of our currency," Dr Mahathir said.

He said depending too much on foreign workers also brought along social problems to the country.

"I was told Bangladeshi men are the source of big problems. They are supposed to be very handsome and a lot of our girls are falling in love with them. But the girls fall in love and married them but don't want to migrate to Bangladesh. They want to stay here and have their husbands with

Malaysian citizenships, that creates the problem.

"But our objective is also to reduce the outflow of our currency so we can reduce the number of foreign workers because I don't think we can do away entirely with them," he said.

Also present at the dialogue were Transport Minister Datuk Seri Dr Ling Liong Sik and International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz.

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