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Dr M: Let's count our blessings, maintain peace and stability

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Malaysians must count their blessings for being able to live in peace and harmony, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He urged the people to maintain the peace and stability and ensure the effective implementation of measures for economic recovery.

"If we see what we have, we will really appreciate it. We should count our blessings for all that we have achieved and remind ourselves that our country is peaceful," he said at a meeting with leaders of 325 Felda schemes.

The meeting, held at the Felda headquarters, was attended by about 1,500 Felda office bearers from Peninsular Malaysia and Sabah.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysians should realise there were foreign attempts to recolonise the country by weakening the economy and depreciating the ringgit.

The Prime Minister also recounted the hardship of pre-independence days and reminded the people that if foreigners were to recolonise the country, all its riches "would be carted away".

He said foreigners would not be able to recolonise Malaysia if the people were united and understood the country's problems.

He said since independence, the Government had distributed the country's riches to the people by providing various opportunities and improving the standard of living.

When the economic crisis flared, he said the Government also came under pressure but it strove to overcome the problems by setting up the National Economic Action Council and implementing several recovery measures.

"I hope, in the current economic crisis, our country will remain peaceful and there will not be many problems," Dr Mahathir said.

He said the Government was also fortunate as workers had not resorted to strikes and that despite the rise in prices of essential items, the increases were not steep.

"Our workers are not striking even though prices have gone up. Salaries have not gone up but they do not strike. We are grateful for that.

"Actually prices would have gone up higher as our currency had depreciated against the US dollar," Dr Mahathir said.

He spoke of the hardship being faced by millions of people in a neighbouring country where he said people had to scrounge for food in garbage dumps while subsidies for essential items like rice, flour and petrol were lifted leading to higher prices.

Dr Mahathir said it was unfortunate that a political problem arose at a time when the country was facing the economic crisis.

"Sadly, now there is kegawatan politik. I did not choose to have it.

I am responsible for ensuring who will lead this country. A person of good character, sincere and honest," he said.

In apparent reference to his former deputy, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, Dr Mahathir said: "When I found he was not qualified (to lead the country) I had to remove him."

The Prime Minister said Ministers and Mentris Besar had been removed before without any disturbances and incidents.

"Today, we see a Deputy Prime Minister removed but doesn't accept it and levels charges against the Government.

"I brought him up this far but if he is not suitable, I have to say so,"

Dr Mahathir said, adding that Anwar had resorted to rioting with the aid of foreigners.

He said the United States was not comfortable with him as Prime Minister.

"I am all right with the United States but they don't like me."

He said they liked his would-be replacement.

"He went many times to the US. When they saw that this man could not become Prime Minister, they came here to bring down the Government."

He said the Felda scheme was unique in that no other country had successfully opened up 800,000 hectares of land for settlers to earn an income for themselves.

"We placed hundreds of thousands of people who had no source of income. When we did that, we increased the number who had sufficient income," he said, adding that schools and clinics were also built and children of settlers were educated.

Dr Mahathir said some developing countries had tried to emulate the Felda scheme but were not as successful.

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