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Mahathir-SMIs

GOVERNMENT HAS NOT NEGLECTED SMALL COMPANIES, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, March 16 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today dismissed criticisms that the government is trying to rescue only big companies which are facing difficulties in the current economic slowdown.

He said the government had, in fact, created a lot of funds to finance small- and medium-scale industries (SMIs) and had a special ministry to look after them but scant attention had been paid to such efforts.

"But people say that we concentrate on our cronies. Our cronies are in the whole of Malaysia because we are politicians. If people don't like us, we will lose.

"So we have to help everybody.... There is nothing that we have not done for the poor people in this country," he told reporters after calling on visiting Vietnamese President Tran Duc Luong here.

He was asked to comment on a call by Umno Youth for a special fund to be set up to help small companies that were affected by the economic slowdown.

Dr Mahathir said he did not understand why big companies should not be helped because "if we allow all companies to incur losses, then the government cannot derive revenue."

Big companies should be helped too because they were taxpayers too, he said.

Dr Mahathir said during the last recession when Ford and Chrysler got into trouble, the US government made available cheap funds to ensure the companies recovered.

"Why is it that we are not allowed to help our companies, not just the big companies. When we help the small (companies), they don't bother," he said.

Dr Mahathir said he himself had made trips to Japan to learn more about franchising and how to start small businesses. During Cabinet meetings, franchising and ways of improving small businesses were regularly discussed.

Looking at Entrepreneur Minister Datuk Mustapa Mohamed who was also present as the minister-in-attendance for the Vietnamese president, Dr Mahathir said the government had a special ministry devoted to helping small businesses.

"You ask Mustapa and the other ministers. Everytime we sit at the Cabinet, we talk about franchising, how to improve small businesses. We have tried to get them involved in manufacturing of small components," he said. -- BERNAMA

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