

07/12/1998

Dr M: No place for seat-warmers

A. Kathirasen; K. Bala

LANGKAWI, Sun. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the Government was not a place for elected representatives to warm their seats but to work towards ensuring the continued sovereignty and progress of the nation.

The Prime Minister and Ministers have the responsibility of "saving" the country from new types of colonialism and economic problems.

Malaysia needed Ministers and leaders who could come up with creative ideas and programmes to "save" the country from economic problems and to ensure development and progress.

"If they fail in this, they should not be re-elected. Also, if they are willing to allow foreigners to decide our fate, they should not be chosen to lead the country," he said.

The Prime Minister said the people, including those involved in the agricultural sector, had a role to play in ensuring the nation did not depend too much on foreigners.

He was speaking at the simultaneous opening of the Farmers Management Institute and the annual meeting of the National Farmers Organisation (Nafas) at the institute built by the Farmers Organisation Authority.

Dr Mahathir said the economic measures taken by the Government in the face of the regional economic turmoil had helped keep Malaysia "safe slightly" from economic colonisation by foreign powers.

"But we have to work harder to ensure we don't depend on foreigners for anything.

"Rather, we should want them to depend on us. For instance, we must save the country from dependence on foreigners for our food needs.

"If we depend too much on food imports, we will become beggars and lose our integrity and freedom," he said.

"Farmers and farmers' organisations must help in this fight against those who want to colonise us in other ways.

"We must realise that there are many who are better (off) than us and if we are not alert, they will colonise us through economic power.

"They are trying to take over many companies owned by Asians in countries which have bowed to the International Monetary Fund. We have not done so and that is why we are safe slightly," he added.

The Prime Minister thanked the farmers for their earlier pledge of loyalty to him and call to him to continue leading the Government. The pledge was read out by leaders of farmers organisations from throughout the country.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia was also fortunate to be much better off than many other countries and he gave some examples of African countries which were struggling to develop.

He said as Malaysia was facing economic problems it was imperative that the people, including farmers, work with the Government in reducing imports.

They should work harder and produce more so that this could be exported, resulting in additional foreign exchange.

He said farmers should venture into commercial growing of non-traditional fruit trees, such as mangosteen which is popular with the Japanese, and not to concentrate on just oil palm and rubber.

Onions, which are now imported mainly from India, could be grown locally.

"And don't take the issue of onions lightly. People say the Indian Government can collapse because onions cost so much today."

(END)