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Mahathir-Measures

DON'T BE COMPLACENT, MAHATHIR TELLS MALAYSIANS

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 5 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has called on Malaysians not to be complacent, given the success of the recent measures to revitalise the economy.

Difficult days lie ahead and they should prepare for all eventualities, he said when addressing the sixth Prime Ministerial Lecture of the Harvard Club, here, tonight.

The prime minister said the people should extend their spirit of "Malaysia Boleh" or "Malaysia Can" exemplified at the recent Kuala Lumpur '98 16th Commonwealth Games to show their abilities everywhere.

"And certainly in the management of our economy and our politics, we must believe that Malaysian Can, Malaysia Boleh, we must and we can manage our own economy in crisis," he said.

Dr Mahathir said they must also avoid the tendency to gloat just because some people had admitted that Malaysia had done the right thing, and that it was they who were wrong.

"It must be admitted though that what Malaysia is doing is not guaranteed to succeed. There are weaknesses and flaws and there is a possibility that we ourselves will undermine what we are doing," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the West would try to break Malaysia by finding "fault lines which could be widened and prised apart".

"We must be prepared for all these, to protect ourselves and our strategies to innovate. We must not be rigid in our approach and in solving problems," he said.

Malaysia recently introduced exchange controls and measures to stimulate the economy in an effort to stop the slide in its economy, largely blamed on unscrupulous currency and stock market speculators.

The prime minister said Malaysia's development since independence had been largely due to its own efforts although it was true that its industrialisation depended to some extent on foreign direct investments.

However, Dr Mahathir said, Malaysia paid for this, for example, through foregoing taxes and by actually providing the larger proportion of the capital needed for these investments.

He said Malaysia still welcomed foreign direct long-term investment in productive capacities.

Dr Mahathir also took a swipe at the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which has come under increasing criticism from numerous quarters for its prescriptions, which he described as shortsighted and lacking in consideration for the great differences in the economies of the different countries.

"The IMF has now admitted that it had made a 'slight mistake' in dealing with the Asian economies.

"It may be slight for the IMF but the cost to the countries of Asia is horrendous," Dr Mahathir said, in obvious reference to massive unemployment and social unrest in several Asian economies which received IMF aid.

He said the abuse of the free market by a few capitalists in the developed countries might have earned them quick profits amounting to billions but the destruction they inflicted on their victims was far greater than what they made for themselves.

He said even if the destruction was intended to change the practices of Asian governments which would lead to a healthier economic recovery, there could be no justifying the massive damage done.

The prime minister said Asian ways of doing business were different from Western ways but this did not mean that Asian ways and values must be inferior or wrong.

Dr Mahathir said the governments of East Asia might not be the best of governments as there was no doubt that there were corrupt practices.

"But can America and Europe claim that they are totally free of governmental corruption, or crony capitalism, or lack of transparency? Besides, the level of corruption of East Asian countries has clearly not gotten in the way of their economic and social development," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that unlike developing countries in other regions, East Asian countries had all grown at a rate well above that of the developed countries of the West and this had benefitted their people as a whole.

He also criticised the western media and their so-called economic experts who seemed to believe that Asian governments must all be corrupt and incompetent.

"Obviously they want to perpetuate economic inequalities and racial animosities. That this will result in instabilities and poor development is perhaps their aim.

"Then, they would be saved from having to compete with these countries," he added.

-- BERNAMA

MAM/MK MR JK