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Mahathir-Steel

USE MORE STEEL FOR CONSTRUCTION, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 7 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamed today called for increased use of steel in the construction and fabrication industry to create domestic demand for steel and to reduce costs.

With increased consumption of steel, Malaysia could have a viable steel industry which is a measure of Malaysia's industrialisation, he said.

However, he said, industry players were currently using more concrete and the production of more cement as the raw material for concrete tended to destroy and disfigure Malaysia's beautiful limestone hills.

The prime minister said this in a speech opening the Malaysian Structural Steel Association Convention 1998 read out by International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz.

Dr Mahathir also called on the construction sector to take advantage of the "forced pause" to re-examine the industry.

He said the construction industry had been in total stoppage due to virtual (International Monetary Fund) IMF-like policies adopted by the previous financial authority in the government.

Dr Mahathir said construction industry players must now consider ways to become more efficient and cost effective.

"The idea of doing most of the work at the worksite is outdated. We should be producing the components of buildings in factories, using more automation and precision. The components can then be transported to the worksite and assembled," he said.

To move forward in the construction industry, he said that Malaysia must develop new technologies with reduced need for unskilled worksite labour.

He said skilled workers could be trained from the local workforce and they should be paid attractive wages.

Dr Mahathir said that as a result of the economic downturn, Malaysia was left with thousands of unskilled foreign workers and outdated construction techniques.

"Our losses were higher because of our high wastage, low productivity, high labour content, long delivery period, poor workmanship and often low quality products," he said.

He said Malaysia could not afford the luxury of having foreign workers. Currently 13 per cent of the workforce or 1.14 million are legal migrant workers.

If illegal immigrants of 800,000 are included (along with 400,000 dependents), they make up about 2.3 million foreign workers.

Although, they had contributed to Malaysia's economic growth, the social and financial costs were very high, the prime minister said.

He said the government now wanted to restart the construction sector but its contribution to reviving Gross Domestic Product would only be seen next year.

He also said that steel components of buildings should be pre-shaped and manufactured in offsite factories.

The precision-made component parts should be transported to the construction site for assembly so as to eliminate the necessity for shaping, bending and fabrication at unsightly and cramped construction sites, he said.

"Factory-produced parts should be better in every way than parts

produced at worksites by relatively unskilled workers," the prime minister added.

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