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ALL BUMIPUTERAS ARE GOVERNMENT "CRONIES"- DR M

JOHOR BAHRU, Aug 28 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today all Bumiputeras are government "cronies" and privatisation of projects had created a crop of efficient and progressive Bumiputeras.

He said the government would not permit full participation of foreigners in privatised projects but only as minority partners as it wanted to give more opportunities to local people especially Bumiputeras.

"Privatisation in Malaysia had succeeded very well compared to privatised projects in other countries," the Prime Minister said at the signing of an agreement to develop Tanjung Puteri on a privatised basis between the Johor Government and Konsortium Hujung Tanah Sdn Berhad here.

Dr Mahathir said privatisation meant something different in other countries.

"To them privatisation is selling the country's assets to foreigners to obtain foreign exchange to settle the national debts," he said.

This situation did not occur in Malaysia as this country did not have debts, he said.

"We do not have national debts. Hence we need not sell our assets to foreigners to get money to pay off debts."

The Prime Minister said the government had given privatised projects to both Bumiputeras and non-Bumiputeras so that all Malaysians would reap full benefits from the privatisation process.

"It is because of this that right from the beginning foreigners and their press had been condemning the privatisation in our country."

"Unfortunately, some of our own people including Bumiputeras have joined the foreigners in condemning the government's privatisation policy," Dr Mahathir said.

The Prime Minister said these local people had been used by foreigners to ensure the failure of the New Economic Policy which was aimed at enabling Bumiputeras to have at least a 30 per cent stake in the national economy.

Even though the 30 per cent target was not achieved over 20 years of the New Economy Policy until 1990, the government had taken various other initiatives to achieve this objective such as the privatisation programme.

Dr Mahathir said it could not be denied that the private sector could manage a privatised government agency more efficiently than if it were to be run by the government.

He said many efficient Bumiputeras had emerged through privatisation and today there was no longer a situation where Bumiputeras were only at the bottom or middle levels.

"Now even at the topmost level there are Bumiputera industrialists who had the capacity to undertake big business with capital expenditure amounting to billions of ringgit," he said.

This situation had helped to reduce among Bumiputeras their feelings of envy and hatred towards other races as they too now had their share in the country's economy and wealth, Dr Mahathir said.

"Unfortunately for us, there are certain groups which feel uneasy in seeing Bumiputeras achieving success and proving their capabilities."

"They accuse the government of adopting a favouritism approach in giving business opportunities to only the cronies of the government," Dr Mahathir said.

These allegations were made as they did not wish to see Bumiputeras

succeed.

"Who are these cronies," he asked.

"These are Bumiputeras who have shown their talents and abilities," the Prime Minister added.

Dr Mahathir said if Bumiputera entrepreneurs did not show abilities in their chosen fields, the government would not give them new opportunities anymore.

Dr Mahathir said Bumiputera entrepreneurs were "not friends of the Government, or of Ministers, or of the Deputy Prime Minister or the Prime Minister nor are they members of the Government."

"They are talented Bumiputeras with the abilities and they are given a helping hand so that among the ranks of our country's top businessmen and industrialists there will also be Bumiputeras," he said.

The Prime Minister said to claim that they were cronies was just to stifle government efforts to ensure balanced development among the various races in this country.

"Anyone, no matter who the Bumiputera is... who gets opportunities.. who succeeds and he is called a crony."

"This means we cannot give any opportunity to anyone for even if we give such an opportunity to the government's enemy and when he succeeds, he is called a government crony," Dr Mahathir said.

The Prime Minister said the government had no intention whatsoever of practising favouritism.

The Government's only intention was to ensure balanced development among the races.

"If we cannot choose anyone because of this crony claim, then there would be no Bumiputera who can achieve success and help create a balance in the economic position of the various races," Dr Mahathir said.

The Prime Minister said, "In fact there is no one government crony as all Bumiputeras in our country are government cronies."

He said the Government would continue to help Bumiputera entrepreneurs who had the ability and integrity so that they could achieve greater success.

"Privatisation is a good avenue for us to provide opportunities to Bumiputeras so that they can venture into bigger business fields in an easier than normal way," Dr Mahathir said.

The Prime Minister said even though there were Bumiputeras who had succeeded without the government's help they were considered handicapped because other successful Bumiputeras did not open up opportunities to them.

"We know also that in business there is what they call networking and we know that when a particular race controls the business, they will only help their own race," he said.

In view of this factor, the government had taken on the role of helping Bumiputera entrepreneurs so that they too would have opportunities in the field of business, Dr Mahathir added.

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