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Mahathir-Heroes

DR MAHATHIR PAYS TRIBUTE TO MALAYSIANS, DESCRIBES THEM HEROES

PUTRAJAYA, Oct 27 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today paid tribute to Malaysians at large describing them as heroes and protectors of the country's independence.

Urging them to further deepen their patriotism, to preserve peace and sustain Malaysia's progress and development, the prime minister said Malaysia belongs to all.

He pledged that the government would put first the interests of all levels of the citizenry in implementing national development policies.

"If not us, who else will preserve the peace in our country, love our country, develop our country, protect our country and preserve national independence," he said.

Dr Mahathir said this when launching the "Syabas Malaysia" (congratulations Malaysia) car stickers for taxis, hire cars and limousines at the Prime Minister's Department here.

The prime minister attributed Malaysia's non-reliance on outsiders and the success of indigenously-designed economic recovery measures to the people's solid support for the government.

"This should make us feel fortunate and grateful as our country continues to stay 100 per cent independent, no one can order us around, control us. And that we are able to tailor our nation-building efforts according to our desires," he said.

The more than 1,000-strong contingent of taxi, hire car and limousine operators and drivers present pledged loyalty to the country and support for Dr Mahathir's leadership and that they would strive to enhance goodwill and harmony among Malaysians as well as rebut defamation against the government.

Be they taxi drivers or entrepreneurs, all Malaysians contributed to and benefited from the country's policies and development, the prime minister said.

While the haves and big-time traders pay taxes to the government which were in turned used to help the masses, taxi drivers also contributed to the development of the tourism industry, a key revenue earner for the country, he said.

"Take the country's recent hosting of the F1 grand prix for instance. Foreign racing fans rode in our taxis and the government has constantly been wooing foreign tourists because tourist money helps the livelihood of the people. And obviously they contribute to the income of taxi drivers," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the government injected more than RM150 million into the local tourism industry each year to attract foreign tourists with taxi drivers nation-wide indirectly benefiting from the spin-offs.

While foreign tourist arrivals also helped boost income of hotels and hotel workers, the development of Putrajaya as the new federal administrative capital and erection of the Petronas Twin Towers, currently the world's tallest building, also brought direct benefits to taxi drivers, he said.

Since tourists would only come to a peaceful Malaysia, it was therefore incumbent on all Malaysians to preserve the prevailing well-being, he said.

"No tourists will come if every day there are riots and street demonstrations. Taxi drivers themselves stand to lose much," said the prime minister.

Through the Entrepreneur Development Ministry, the government would ensure that the lot of taxi drivers were being taken care and it was mindful of their grouses over some of its policies, Dr Mahathir said.

"But it is never our intention to victimise taxi operators or drivers. We too want them to make the most of the country's development," he said.

The prime minister said it would be meaningless for the government to issue unlimited number of taxi permits, as desired by some quarters, if they were no passengers to use the taxis.

Dr Mahathir commended taxi operators and drivers for answering the government's call to stick the "Syabas Malaysia" label on their vehicles to display their love for the country.

"Let's not do anything to the detriment of the country for the simple reason that destruction to the nation will not spare us all," he said.

Taxi drivers also have a cause to be proud of being Malaysians because the country's advancement indeed reflected their success as well, the prime minister said.

He said taxi drivers could convey to tourists who rode in their cabs that all Malaysians have a share in Malaysia's progress.

"Let's all talk about the good things about the country and what it has if we don't want others to belittle us as lacking in many things," Dr Mahathir added.

-- BERNAMA

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