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Mahathir-millennium (Challenges)

MAHATHIR CALLS ON M'SIANS TO BE PREPARED TO FACE NEW CHALLENGES

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 30 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said tonight that Malaysians must be prepared to face challenges in the new millennium by acquiring all the knowledge and skills that are compatible with a country that is progressing towards the status of a developed nation.

The Prime Minister said he felt that the new generation was beginning to understand their responsibility.

"And that is a good sign," he told a news conference during the launching of the "Malaysia's Centennial Towards A New Millennium" celebration at the National Stadium in Bukit Jalil here.

Also present at the news conference were Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Tajol Rosli Ghazali.

Dr Mahathir was asked about the characteristics or attitude that should be adopted by Malaysians to face the new millennium.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia had gone through a lot of experiences in the past 100 years, including being colonised a few times.

He said that no one could deny that since gaining independence, Malaysia had seen rapid development compared to 100 years of British rule.

"It shows that we have the ability to govern our own country and bring progress.

"The people, it seems, are also ready to join us in developing the country," said Dr Mahathir.

Asked on the reception by the crowd at the stadium tonight, Dr Mahathir said it was "fantastic."

"I don't think we had expected that many," he said.

The Prime Minister said about 100,000 people had filled the stadium while another 20,000 people were outside the stadium.

"It looks like the stadium is too small," he said in jest.

He said the public response to the National Day celebrations this year was exceptionally good compared to that at the Dataran Merdeka last year.

Dr Mahathir also said tonight's turn-out was far bigger than that of the opening of the Commonwealth Games XVI last year.

To a question on whether Malaysians were ready to face the new millennium, Dr Mahathir said: "I think so."

He said accusations that the young generation was "not happy or unfaithful was not true."

"Some of them, yes, but the majority of Malaysian youths look happy enough in celebrating the National Day, declaring their support to independence and national development.

"That's why they are here. They are clapping their hands at the Proton car, not me," he said in light-hearted vein.

Dr Mahathir and his wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamad Ali had earlier arrived at the stadium in a Proton prototype, "Cabriolet" with the Prime Minister behind the wheel.

On the teleconference he had with all the Mentris Besar and Chief Ministers, Dr Mahathir said it marked the reality of the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) allowing a person to speak, hear and see another person who at another location.

He said it is a new technology which could be used by anyone, even if he were to be far away from the country.

On the Proton Cabriolet, Dr Mahathir said it was his intention to market the car but due to special features of the car like its roof top, it would take sometime before it could go into the market.

But, he said the car would generate public interest when it was exhibited in other countries.

On the Budget 2000 which would be tabled in the Dewan Rakyat in October, Dr Mahathir said it has always been "a people's budget as the government only builds things that are useful for the people like dams, power plants, airports and ports and even the Petronas Twin Towers."

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