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Mahathir-Asli

ONLY MALAYSIA PROTECTS RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

KUALA LUMPUR, June 22 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said only Malaysia gives special treatment to her indigenous people and spares no efforts to improve their lot.

"In other countries, the indigenous people are placed in reserve land. In some, the children are taken away from their families. Some countries have high mortality rate among the indigenous people whereas the Orang Asli population in Malaysian keeps growing," he said.

He said allegations by non-governmental organisations and foreign countries that the Orang Asli were neglected lot were baseless.

Dr Mahathir was speaking to reporters after presenting certificates of competency in construction to 17 Orang Asli youths at Bukit Lanjan here.

He said in order to improve further their living standards further, the government had even resettled Orang Asli from their rural settlements to urban housing estates.

A case in point was the re-settlement of 158 Orang Asli in Bukit Lanjan to the Damansara Perdana housing estate near here.

Reporters asked the prime minister about Orang Asli being nominated to stand in the coming general election especially in areas with sizeable Orang Asli population.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Umno president, said while most Orang Asli were Umno members, it was up to the party or other political organisations they were members of, to decide on their eligibility.

"But we can't give an Orang Asli a seat to contest just because he is an Orang Asli. Doing so may not get the support of others. And also we know that he can't win because there is not a single constituency where the Orang Asli electorate makes up the majority," he said.

In his speech earlier, Dr Mahathir said that while the government would strive to further improve their lot, it would at the same time preserve their customs and the traditional native administrative system.

Only by uplifting their overall status could the government enable the Orang Asli to stand tall with the other advanced communities in the country, he said.

Dr Mahathir said it was not the intention of the government to see the Orang Asli do away with their customs. It only wanted them to change to a modern life-style as the other communities.

This would require them to make the most of skills training opportunities provided by the government, he said.

He said gradual exposure to modern life had influenced some Orang Asli to be more enthusiastic about changing from being merely involved in shifting cultivation to modern living.

The suggestion that Orang Asli are unskilled or untalented people has no credence because they are indeed good craftsmen especially in wood-carving and weaving, he said.

He urged Orang Asli youths to acquire skills in the construction field because of the ever-growing demand for such manpower in the domestic construction sector.

He said it would be ideal if local manpower, including from the Orang Asli community, could meet the labour demand in the sector, thus saving the country substantial outflow of foreign exchange.

-- BERNAMA

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