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PM: Orang Asli can have a better life while retaining culture, tradition

Ramlan Said; Izatun Hanim Shaari

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - The Government wants to upgrade the standard of living of the Orang Asli community without changing their culture and tradition, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He added the Government wanted to see all races and communities progress together in multi-racial Malaysia as any disparity would be unhealthy.

"We do not want to see the Orang Asli remain backward in their own country whereas the other races move ahead."

He said this at a ceremony to present certificates of competence in construction to 17 Orang Asli youths at Bukit Lanjan near Damansara, Selangor.

Dr Mahathir said it was not true that the Orang Asli did not have the capability to perform like the other races - they just had not been given the opportunity.

"If given the training, they will gradually be able to join the mainstream of society.

"But at the same time, they must be prepared to change as whatever programmes introduced for them would be meaningless if they do not agree."

This is the first training programme of its kind for Orang Asli in the country.

It is aimed at providing Orang Asli youths with skills and work experience that would enable them to secure stable employment.

The one-year programme is jointly carried out by Saujana Triangle Sdn Bhd - a member of the Emkay Group - and Akademi Binaan Malaysia and Emkay's sub-contractors.

It is part of a package in the relocation exercise for the Damansara Perdana project carried out by Saujana Triangle.

Dr Mahathir said the Government had allocated much funds to help the community.

He added the Government was prepared to increase the amount whenever necessary.

He said despite the programmes and training provided for the community, they were still lagging behind if compared to other races. The number of successful Orang Asli in various fields was too small.

Advising the audience of mostly Orang Asli in the Bukit Lanjan area, that there was no need for them to change or sacrifice their culture and tradition like having a Tok Batin as their leader, Dr Mahathir said:

"You must be prepared to be trained in areas or jobs that you have never done before. If this is done, I am confident the Orang Asli in Malaysia would acquire skills that will lead them to earn a better income."

Citing the construction industry as an example, he said it was important that the country produced an adequate number of skilled workers to avoid dependence on foreign labour.

At a Press conference later, Dr Mahathir said the relocation exercise involving the Orang Asli in Bukit Lanjan was proof that the community had not been neglected.

He said the majority of the 158 households involved in the project were now millionaires as each of them had been given three properties and 45,000 Amanah Saham Bumiputera units.

He said this was a far cry if compared to other countries where the aborigines were treated badly.

Dr Mahathir said claims by some non-Governmental organisations and

developed countries that Orang Asli in Malaysia had been treated badly was just a tactic to cover their own weaknesses.

To a question whether an Orang Asli stands a chance to be nominated as a candidate in the election, Dr Mahathir said this was up to the political parties that they represented.

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