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Pledge to look into rubber price woes

JITRA, Sat. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today promised smallholders he will pay particular attention to the low rubber price affecting them.

The Prime Minister said, however, the people must understand that rubber prices were controlled by the market.

He said at the annual delegates' meeting of the Kubang Pasu Umno division that he realised the problems of smallholders facing low rubber prices.

He was responding to a call made during the meeting that the Government take steps to raise the rubber price and that this was being made an issue by Pas.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Kubang Pasu MP and division head, said Pas could only criticise, but would not be able to raise the rubber price as it was determined by the market.

On a call by another delegate that action be taken against government staff who did not support Umno, Dr Mahathir said this would not benefit the party.

"If we dismiss them, they will vote for the Opposition and if transferred, they can vent their anger by spreading their influence in other areas."

He said Umno members should also refute allegations by the Opposition that the Government was helping to enrich those in the corporate sector.

"We help corporate people not to enrich them, but because a lot of people depend on them for their livelihood. We realise that if corporate people fail, a lot of people will lose jobs and the Government cannot get taxes from them."

He said the Government made efforts to ensure that the wealthy Malay corporate figures did not go bankrupt as it did not want Malays to become second-class citizens.

"By criticising efforts to help corporate people, is Pas trying to say that it did not want the Malays to be rich?"

"I hope Pas will openly say it does not want to see wealthy Malays."

He said wealthy Malays had been contributing towards useful activities and projects, including spending a lot of money on the construction of mosques.

The RM5.5 million mosque in Akar Peluru, Alor Star, which he visited yesterday, for example, was also constructed through the contribution of a businessman.

The RM70 million Islamic arts museum in Kuala Lumpur, rated as the best in the Islamic world, was also built through contributions from a corporate figure.

Dr Mahathir said he was proud of Malays who became wealthy on their own efforts, even if they earned much more than he himself.

"My income is not even a quarter of what these corporate figures are earning, but I am very proud of them."

These corporate figures, he said, had wealth, but never forgot to fulfil their responsibility to help the poor, pay zakat and give donations.

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