

03 NOV 2000

Mahathir-Bumiputeras

BUMIPUTERAS CAN NO LONGER BLAME THE COLONIALISTS, SAYS PM

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 3 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that Bumiputeras can no longer blame the colonialists or others if they still fail to change their fate.

He said that the Bumiputeras must strive further to improve themselves because the mission to further enhance the status and dignity of the race should be embraced by all parties and not only Mara and the government.

"For four-and-a-half centuries we were colonised and prevented from improving ourselves. We were disregarded and dismissed as though we did not have any rights at all.

"But now we have attained independence. Maybe 43 years of independence is insufficient to change not only our fate but also our progress," he said when launching Rida-Mara golden jubilee celebrations at the Putra World Trade Centre, here.

Dr Mahathir however said that Mara, entrusted with the task of changing the fate of the Malays and Bumiputeras in the country, was still relevant and its agenda must continue to be pursued.

The prime minister said that he was still not satisfied with the outcome of all the efforts and allocations made by Mara although he was satisfied with the initiatives taken by the agency.

He said that Bumiputeras were still lagging behind in almost all the economic activities even though Mara and other agencies and funds had been set up to assist the Bumiputeras.

The Bumiputeras themselves, he said, should make good use of opportunities if they wish to obtain effective results from Mara's projects and assistance.

"Actions resorted to like selling subsidised fertilisers or making EPF withdrawals for computer purchase but using the money on other miscellaneous purchases will undermine the latest government's effort to balance the economic position among the various races in the country," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that the government was now concerned over the absence of Bumiputera participation in new growth centres as they were not keen in the retail business and more interested in securing big government contracts which promise faster and higher returns.

The government, he said, had introduced programmes to encourage Bumiputeras carry out retail business in the new townships to prevent the various races from being segregated again and to avoid an unhealthy social situation.

The prime minister said that Mara had been provided capital amounting to billions of ringgit to assist the Malays and other Bumiputeras in all fields but the outcome did not reflect the efforts and allocations made and in fact sometimes the result was very poor.

Today, he said, there were some who never appreciate the assistance provided, were thankless and ungrateful while some were angry because repayments were demanded for loans granted.

He said that most unfortunately, this kind of attitude was instilled by parties with other motives, placing more emphasis on their target group than on the performance of the Malays as a whole.

"I realise that I will be condemned for exposing the mistakes of our own people the Malays, and other Bumiputeras. But let the condemnation be hurled than having our own race lagging further behind.

"It is most irresponsible if more importance is placed on own popularity than on efforts to improve the situation in our own community," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that Mara had sponsored some 160,000 students in local and foreign institutions of higher learning since 1966, allocating some RM5 billion, while another 300,000 had been provided training and education at Mara's own educational institutions nationwide.

In terms of funding, from 1951 until last August, Rida-Mara provided a total of RM1.2 billion in loans to some 129,000 people.

A total of 4,433 units of business lots and manufacturing premises has been leased by Mara to Bumiputera traders and entrepreneurs nationwide while hundreds or thousands of them have been provided training and entrepreneurial guidance.

At the function, the "Tokoh Rida-Mara" award was presented to the first director of Institut Teknologi Mara, Tan Sri Arshad Ayob.

Dr Mahathir also honoured former Rida and Mara chairmen and former directors-general of Mara.

Speaking to reporters later, Dr Mahathir said that the government would study the causes and reasons for the failure in meeting the objective to improve the lot of the Bumiputeras.

For example, he said, the government would study why boys account for only 35 per cent of the total Bumiputera students at present.

"What are the boys doing...are they studying somewhere else or they are not pursuing further studies. That we would like to know," he said.

-- BERNAMA

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