

16 JUL 2000

Mahathir-Economy

LEND A HELPING HAND TO BUMIS, PM TELLS THE CHINESE COMMUNITY

KUCHING, July 16 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today urged the Chinese community in the country to lend a helping hand to rebuild Bumiputera businesses affected by the recent economic turmoil in efforts to accelerate national prosperity.

He said that during the recession, many Bumiputera companies collapsed because they were too new, too fast and very delicate and were almost completely destroyed by the currency attack.

"Malaysia believes in a policy of prospering your neighbour, not bickering with your neighbour or making them poorer. We want them to be richer because then, we can do something with them but if they are poor, they will come with begging bowls," he said when opening the RM10 million Wisma Chinese Chamber Kuching, at Padungan, here.

He said it was fortunate that during that time, nothing untoward happened as in some other countries in the region where riots and racial tension broke up, because of the prevailing prosperity in the country.

When the new economic policy was first launched, to bring up the indigenous people to have a share in the economic wealth, the Chinese had cooperated in such a way that it was successfully implemented.

However, their Bumiputera counterparts must understand that they must work very hard and practise prudent financial management and cannot blame the Chinese community if they fail, he said.

Dr Mahathir said that the government recognised the contribution of the Chinese community in the country's emergence as one of the strongest economies in the developing countries due to their dynamism.

"The Chinese community realise the importance of reducing the disparity in the economic wealth among the different communities and give them a share in it. And because they (Bumiputeras) have a share, the feeling of jealousy and envy to the Chinese community have almost disappeared," he said.

The prime minister said that it was the reason why during the economic turmoil there was no outbreak of racial fighting in the country.

At present, the average per capita income is US\$3,500 (RM13,300) which takes into account those from the lower income earners like Bumiputeras and Indians, he said.

By the same token, if the Bumiputeras could be brought up the economic ladder, the per capita income of the country would be much higher, Dr Mahathir said.

He said when the Bumiputeras were enriched, a market was being created for the Chinese to produce goods to sell to them.

"So it pays to rich them because when they are rich, they become good customers but if they are poor, then of course it becomes a problem to us," he said.

Similarly, when Malaysia decided to allow foreign investors to come and set up their factories, by giving them tax free holiday for 10 years, to manufacture and export their products, the country gained, he said.

He said that in the process, the country prospered because it was able to create jobs for the people, to learn the manufacturing, exporting and identifying of markets for products such as microchips, by Malaysian-owned companies.

On the Chinese community, which comprised the second largest ethnic group in Sarawak, Dr Mahathir said that they had built up much of the state's economic wealth.

Sarawak had remained a peaceful place because the Chinese had understood the cultural values of the indigenous people by getting along well with them, he said.

Earlier, Sarawak Chief Minister Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud said that the Wisma Chinese Chamber Kuching, which houses the Kuching Chinese General Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCGCCI) and Associated Chinese Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Sarawak (ACCCIS), reflected the progress of the Chinese in the state.

He said they were noted for the development of education, beyond the secondary level, and sponsoring of Chinese-medium schools for the advancement of their community.

However, such efforts should match the requirements of the present human resources in the training of future generations, he said.

The KCGCCI, founded in 1910, and ACCCIS in 1965, have since played a significant role as a channel between the people and the government in the fields of education, social welfare and charity.

-- BERNAMA

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