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MAHATHIR-SALARY

MAHATHIR TELLS PRIVATE SECTOR TO PAY REASONABLE SALARIES

KUALA LUMPUR, July 24 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today reminded the private sector of the danger of paying too high a salary to employees.

Pointing to the high salaries of executives in the United States, he said that these (high salaries) had caused them to pay attention only to quarterly reports to show how much they made and to get perks like share options.

"In the end, the company doesn't do as well," Dr Mahathir said.

As such, the private sector should pay reasonable salaries, he stressed.

He said this during a dialogue session after presenting a keynote address at the two-day Malaysia Incorporated Summit Conference here today.

The summit discusses the effectiveness of the Malaysia Inc concept introduced in 1983 which involves close co-operation between the public and private sector.

On a lighter note, he said he feels like leaving office because as the CEO of Malaysia Inc, he was paid only RM16,000 (per month), "when people working under me draw as much as RM40,000.

He said when the private sector gives out high salaries, there would be a wide disparity (of income) with the public sector and this would make it difficult for the public sector to lure the best people.

Replying to a remark made from the floor on signs of deteriorating quality of public service because the best people now were not inclined to join the government, he said: "We are not going to have a strong administration as long as we can't attract the best people."

Dr Mahathir said compared with the past, the private sector now had done well and some were able to pay high salaries, drawing the cream of the crop to this sector.

The government could not respond by increasing salaries of its staff as the private sector could also do the same, thus causing "a wide (income) disparity as great as before."

"While we would like to increase the income of government servants, our hands are tight because our revenue is not big. That's why we want to make the private sector as prosperous as possible," he said.

In this way, the government could collect sufficient revenue to pay the civil servants, he added.

As for public service, Dr Mahathir said the government wants to provide a friendly service.

He also said that it would take some time for the government departments, state and local authorities, to practise the client charter introduced by the federal government.

"This is a slow process. The process of educating people," he added.

Asked about the government's stance on food franchise, he said the government is actively promoting it as it helps to increase the presence of bumiputera retailers in town centres.

To a question, the prime minister said that under the Malaysia Inc concept, the government is concerned about the environment and would like the private sector and individuals to be sensitive to pollution and sustainable development.

"We are one of the few developing countries which had set up a Ministry of Environment very early on," he said, stressing that 56 percent of the

country is covered by natural forest and another 20 percent by tree plantations.

Dr Mahathir also said that it was unfortunate that Malaysia has to cope with "people with a hidden agenda when they talk about environment."

Apart from certain news media which exaggerate things like the haze, there are people like the Swiss man, (Bruno Manser) who claimed he wants to preserve the lifestyle of the Penans.

"We should be moderate and accept the need to do certain things even though it is not good for the environment.

"We should not be fanatical like the Swiss man who insists that the Penans should live a short life and enjoy shooting monkeys for food.

"I wonder what (would) happen to Swiss people if they remain in their caves and civilised people say let us keep them in their caves. I don't think the Swiss will appreciate that," Dr Mahathir said. -- BERNAMA

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