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Mahathir-Consumers

CONSUMER ASSOCIATIONS MUST PLAY MORE ACTIVE ROLE, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, March 16 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad wants consumer associations to play a more active role in drawing up and implementing programmes on consumerism to raise public awareness on the rights of consumers.

He said the role of the associations in helping the government to raise public awareness on consumerism was most crucial.

"Unfortunately, there are consumer associations that are not active in discharging their responsibilities and there some associations which have few members," he said at the dinner in conjunction with the 2001 World Consumers Day at the Putra World Trade Centre, here tonight.

The small membership had resulted in the associations being incapable of organising consumer programmes and activities and were always depending on the government to implement these activities, said Dr Mahathir.

He said this should not be the case, adding that the associations must be responsible in educating the consumers together with the government so that they would have greater awareness on their rights as consumers and were able to carry out their responsibilities as consumers effectively.

Dr Mahathir also called on the leaders of consumer associations to be more proactive in assisting the government to educate consumers especially in view of the globalisation era and open market system which was rapidly growing.

"Consumer associations have a role and responsibility in explaining to the people the positive and negative aspects of globalisation, its impact on the people, country and consumers," he said.

He said the open market system which was being practised by the country today must also be explained to the consumers so that they would have a better understanding of the system and would not blame the government only when there were fluctuations in the prices of goods in the market.

"The demand for quality and efficiency to be improved while prices should come down does not reflect rational thinking," he said.

Dr Mahathir said it was not logical for consumers to ask for prices of goods and services to be maintained at the prevailing level or reduced while all costs had gone up.

The Prime Minister said consumer associations must improve the quality of their services to become an organisation that was sensitive, prudent, credible and respected by everyone.

He called for greater cooperation between the consumer associations and the government in future for the benefit of the consumers in the country.

"As an association that has close contacts with the target group at the grassroots level, information transmitted by the consumer associations can help the government in planning appropriate policies for the country as a whole...don't let the association be guided by other considerations such as political interests," he said.

He said the negative developments in the computer and information technology had also forced consumers to be more careful in carrying out transactions through the e-commerce so that they would not be easily cheated.

Consumers should improve their skill in e-commerce to make wise and accurate decisions without incurring losses because the computer literate generation would play a crucial role together with the government in strengthening the national economy, Dr Mahathir said.

He reminded consumers to be more sensitive towards imported goods which were produced at lower cost because it was highly likely that such goods would be of low quality.

"Developing countries would become dumping ground for goods from the developed countries and there is a high possibility that these goods are of low quality and some of them are not fit for human consumption," he said.

As such, Dr Mahathir said consumers should not ignore local goods and services to protect the country's independence and sovereignty.

He also called on Malaysian consumers to discard the high-living style and culture and instead plan their spending according to their capacity and avoid wastage because such traits could bring negative effects to the people and country.

"As for the businessmen, who are also consumers at the same time, they should practise good business ethics and be responsible. They would not lose and in fact would be appreciated for being ethical businessmen who could be trusted," he said.

As for the government, Dr Mahathir said besides promoting and developing healthy and ethical trade practices, it would also strive to ensure that the people's prosperity were ensured and protected.

He said the introduction of the Consumer Protection Act 1999 was not meant to restrict the growth of trade in the country but to create a healthy atmosphere for trade which would be able to compete based on ethical practices.

"The establishment of the consumers tribunal under the act was aimed at creating another channel for consumers to claim compensation for losses suffered during the process of buying and selling although they enjoy the services provided by the businessmen," he said.

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