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Mahathir-Malays

DR M: EASIER TO INITIATE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES THAN TO CHANGE MALAYS

PUTRAJAYA, July 18 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said tonight it has been easier to implement development programmes than to bring about an attitudinal change among the Malays in his 20 years as prime minister.

The prime minister said he had failed in his efforts to change the attitude of the Malays despite trying out many ways.

Efforts to initiate physical development programmes were much easier during his tenure as prime minister, he said when speaking at the Backbenchers' Club dinner at a hotel here.

Dr Mahathir said he had been criticised by the Malays as being too materialistic and giving too much emphasis to worldly things than the hereafter.

"Actually, we will still remain as Malays but we have to change our attitude to be better off," he said.

He said the progress and backwardness of a race depend on the life values of a race.

"If we practise good values, our race will progress.

"The Malays should work hard but I find that they are not interested, not that they cannot," he said.

Dr Mahathir cited as example how the padi planted by the Chinese produced better yield because they used fertilizers as compared to the Malay farmers who sold the fertilizers given to them.

He said various ways, including courses had been given to the Malays but still all the efforts were a failure.

He said it was easier to carry out physical development, including providing business opportunities from which the government could collect taxes from the businessmen later to finance the country's development programmes.

Dr Mahathir said he was fortunate that he had practised as a doctor before and had made many decisions to solve problems.

He said although he was not an expert in the financial sector, he could settle problems in the sector by working to find solutions.

In his tenure as prime minister, the most difficult time he faced was in 1997 when the country faced the economic downturn caused by the currency trading, he said.

He said although Malaysia faced recession in 1985, the situation was not as bad as in 1997.

Dr Mahathir also gave a detailed account of the economic problems faced then, including activities of the rogue currency speculator George Soros.

He said he had to make a decision whether to accept or reject assistance from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to overcome the economic downturn.

Dr Mahathir said he was then in Argentina attending the Group of 15 Developing Nations' Summit and had to call his Economic Adviser Tan Sri Mohamed Nor Yakcop, who was then handling currency trading for Bank Negara, to explain the situation and to find a mechanism to solve the problem.

The prime minister also said that a neighbouring country had also aided to sabotage Malaysia's economy then.

On his prime ministership, Dr Mahathir said he had never dreamt of becoming the prime minister when he entered politics.

"But I had a slight interest to become a minister," he said, advising

Members of Parliament not to be too ambitious of becoming the prime minister.

Nevertheless, they can prepare themselves by acquiring various knowledge, he added.

-- BERNAMA

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