

30 AUG 2001

Mahathir-Message

DR M CALLS ON M'SIANS TO RENEW COMMITMENT TO DEFEND COUNTRY

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 30 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad tonight called on Malaysians to renew their commitment to remain united and move in unison to develop Malaysia further while preserving its independence and sovereignty.

Malaysia belongs to all of its citizens, be they Bumiputera or non-Bumiputera and they all share the right to be proud of the country's achievements, said the Prime Minister.

"Malaysia is our country. Let us defend it so that we continue being independent, free, sovereign, progressive and prosperous and continue to command world respect," he said in a telecast address to the nation to mark the 44th Independence Day tomorrow.

Dr Mahathir made special mention of appreciation to Malaysians at large especially members of the security forces, public and private sector workers, students within the country and abroad.

"On behalf of the government, I thank you very much for the invaluable contribution towards the stability, advancement and development of our fortunate and beloved country," he said.

Dr Mahathir said it was a source of pride and gratitude for all Malaysians that only within a short period Malaysia had reached a heartening level of progress and was able to ward off all sorts of attacks on its economy and politics-wise.

He said thankful Malaysians would celebrate the 44th anniversary of the country's independence knowing that the country would continue to promise a good life amidst a sound economy and multi-racial harmony.

"We are free from the clutches of international agencies and the super powers. Our Ringgit is stable and of reasonable value, not too high and not too low. Our reserves can sustain more than three months of imports. The stock market is also healthy with inflation is kept at less than three per cent," he said.

Dr Mahathir attributed Malaysia's emergence as the most advanced and a model among the developing countries to the cooperation of all races that enabled the government to effectively run the country.

Despite the all-encompassing nature of the country's development, he said there are still remote areas in Sabah and Sarawak lacking water and power supply, tarred road, schools, health clinics and telephone facilities.

"We cannot remain with our indigenous way of living. We have to change in order to enjoy sophisticated and modern living," he said.

Dr Mahathir said Kuala Lumpur has actually attained the status of a metropolis of a developed country with the availability of electric train service, elevated highways, shopping complexes selling goods from all over the world and well-lit parks.

Even so, Dr Mahathir said the government did not deny that squatters and poor town and city-dwellers lacking basic amenities still abound and yet, on the other hand, there are also squatters who subscribed to the Astro cable television.

"In fact there is no developed country in the world that does not have poor and down-trodden people," he said.

He said that detractors of Malaysia's achievements were no longer championing the plight of certain poverty-stricken groups of Malaysians but have instead questioned why two million foreign immigrants were making good

money at the expense of poor locals.

"Why can't we ourselves take over the work done by the foreigners and earn the good money for ourselves? Why is that there are jobless Malaysians while available jobs could support the immigrants?" the prime minister asked.

He said if only Malaysians could grab part of the best opportunities available, none of them would be unemployed.

Dr Mahathir said there were also Malaysians refusing to recognise that the country is Islamic to ignite hatred towards their political enemies whereas the Muslim world not only rated Malaysia as an Islamic nation but also as a model for other Muslim countries to emulate.

"Because of their political ends, these people persistently deny Malaysia's Islamic characteristics," he said, adding that their fanatical supporters even went beyond to set up militant wings to seize power from the elected government.

"Duped by political leaders with ulterior motives and believing that their action is legitimate and an Islamic obligation and because they reject the democratic approach and spurred by a desire to create an Islamic state of their dream, today they face the law dealing with people committing armed insurgency," he said.

It was unfortunate that other people too had to fall victims to their denial of Malaysia's Islamic fortes and of the hatred incited by the political party concerned, he said.

He said the minds of the younger generation of Malays have been disturbed by such hatred sowed by teachers and lecturers who absconded from their basic duty to impart knowledge.

It was unfortunate still that religious teachers entrusted with inculcating Islamic values and strengthening the faith shirked their responsibility and left the students and youngsters in moral decay and decadence, he said.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia would continue to progress due to the diligence of the other races while the Malays would risk getting more backwards for neglecting to master knowledge to attain efficiency and enhance political strength.

On foreign relations, Dr Mahathir said while Malaysia would not side with any bloc and would remain friendly with all nations, its outspokenness against injustice had irked certain quarters, especially the foreign media, which often ridiculed and discredited the country.

He said countries which earlier regarded Malaysia as undemocratic were now eager to improve ties and have acknowledged its wisdom in steadfastly upholding the principles and the rule of law.

At the same time, countries hoping to see the downfall of the elected government have begun to realise that those intending to replace it are extremists who only used Islam as a tool to realise their objective, he said.

It had now dawned on such countries that having ties with extremist groups would not be better than having relations with the government in power, he said.

"Malaysia is a democratic country and only the Malaysians themselves can determine who should govern this lucky country," he said while reminding Malaysians to have full and strong grasp of information technology in facing the challenges of globalisation.

-- BERNAMA

HS HS MAI RYN