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Dr M: Help maintain stability for continued progress, development

JOHOR BARU, Sat. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today urged the people to help maintain stability so that the country could continue to enjoy progress and development.

The Prime Minister said in a situation that was peaceful the Government could formulate and implement strategies to take the country, which is already most developed among developing countries, to greater heights.

He reminded the people of the effects of the economic slowdown in the United States which were being felt now.

"The export rate of our products to the US used to be 23 per cent, but because of the slowdown, it cannot afford to buy that much from us, so we feel the effects. Nevertheless, we are finding ways to overcome the problem.

"In fact, we have succeeded in easing the effect (of the economic slowdown)," he told more than 3,000 people from the civil service, the private sector and voluntary organisations during lunch at the Menteri Besar's residence, Saujana.

Dr Mahathir, who ended his two-day visit to Johor, was accompanied by Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali.

He hoped that during times like this (when the Government is striving to improve the economy) the people would help prevent the country from being saddled with other problems, such as disharmony.

Dr Mahathir also gave some tips on how the people could not only sustain themselves but make some extra money without having to fall back on government assistance too often in bad times.

Farmers in Johor, for example, could earn a little extra by diversifying their activities such as venturing into livestock farming, fish rearing, and even handicraft making, and not confine themselves to oil palm cultivation.

"When oil palm gave good income, many turned to oil palm planting.

"As a result, the two million tonnes of palm oil production annually 15 years ago has increased to about 11 million tonnes now and we have to get the markets."

At the same time, he said, countries like India, Pakistan and China, which were importing oil palm from Malaysia, would not take too much oil palm from outside because they also wanted to protect their own edible oil industry.

"So please listen to the Government and reduce oil palm production and if you (the farmers) can diversify your activities, then you will not be pressed when the oil palm price drops."

Dr Mahathir said besides going into poultry and livestock, they could also venture into fruit farming and planting medicinal herbs.

On a lighter tone, he said: "People ask me how to keep fit. Actually I myself take herbs - that's no secret.

He said all these farming and rearing activities could be developed successfully in "a big way" provided that they were planned properly.

"As far as the Government is concerned, we will help (where possible)."

Dr Mahathir said by diversifying their activities, the farmers could still earn steady income, without asking the Government to increase the prices of their commodities.

"They must understand that the Government also needs money to provide roads, electricity and water to the people."

He said the farmers should be wise in their spending when they earn good income so that they would not be in financial difficulties during an economic slowdown. They should save and invest their money for the rainy days.

Dr Mahathir was happy with the rapid development in Johor and believed it would become the most developed State even before 2020 if programmes were carried out effectively and efficiently.

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