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King: Government formulating National Social Policy

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KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - The Yang di-Pertuan Agong Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah today called on the people to avoid religious, racial and political conflicts, saying the Government is formulating a National Social Policy aimed at creating a better society.

The policy is intended to develop a strong and healthy society in all aspects which would ensure the continued prosperity of the people, religion, race and country, he said.

He reminded the people to strengthen unity in defending the country against its enemies, saying racial or religious conflicts could affect the nation's prosperity and political stability.

"We call on all citizens to be grateful for the prosperity that we are enjoying now," he said when opening the third session of the 10th Parliament.

"Being thankful is one way of expressing our gratitude and praise to God and our thanks to fellow human beings."

His emphasis on unity was a timely reminder following the recent clashes in Kampung Medan.

A paper on the National Social Policy is now being prepared by the National Unity and Social Development Ministry. It will provide guidelines on social requirements that need to be fulfilled in relation to development.

For instance, the guidelines will outline the basic social facilities needed in an area to be developed like kindergartens, parks and schools, and the impact of the development on neighbouring areas.

In a wide-ranging speech, the King said he was grateful that the security of the country was under control and that the nation remained peaceful and stable.

"Although Malaysia has attained rapid economic growth, we should be mindful that efforts to maintain this achievement are more challenging.

"There are numerous risks from within and without that can threaten the current economic situation and negate Malaysia's efforts to become a fully developed nation by the year 2020."

On the Bumiputera business and industrial community, he said efforts to restructure corporate ownership would be re-emphasised to rectify the economic imbalance among the ethnic groups.

An example is by promoting the active involvement of Bumiputeras in the K-economy and strengthening their resilience and competitiveness to cope with challenges of a borderless economy.

The King said the Government was very concerned with the fall in the prices of primary commodities such as palm oil and rubber.

As such, he said efforts would be continued to stabilise prices by exploring new markets, increasing research and development so as to enhance productivity, reduce costs and diversify the end-use of the commodities.

Touching on mosques, the King urged all Muslims to constantly safeguard the sanctity of the institution.

"Maintain the function of the mosque as a place of worship and to foster goodwill and brotherhood among Muslims. Do not abuse the holy mosque to the extent of using it to incite disunity and hatred among different groups."

Calling on all Malays and Muslims to stay united and not to be divided,

he said, "My Government will strive to ensure unity of the Malays and prevent discord."

The King expressed happiness on the success of all efforts to reduce poverty, adding the Government would persevere with such efforts consistent with its target of eradicating absolute poverty by the year 2005.

A new programme for eradicating poverty - the People's Prosperity Development Scheme - would be implemented in areas and among groups which have recorded a high incidence of poverty, including the Orang Asli community, he added.

Under the Eighth Malaysia Plan, he said rural development would be intensified towards making the areas more developed.

"The focus will be on infrastructure development to improve the quality of life among the rural community and as a catalyst for economic growth and the application of information and communication technology."

The Government, he said, would also conduct a review on the concept, functions and future of FELDA. Emphasis would be given towards encouraging the second generation of settlers to carry on the work of their parents so as to acquire higher income consistent with current living standards.

The King spoke on health services, saying the Government would continue to upgrade its basic health services while specialist services would be extended to enable more Malaysians to benefit from them.

"A health welfare fund has been set up to help lessen the burden of the sick and their families in paying for the cost of medical treatment."

On public service, he said members of the public service, police and the armed forces should uphold their code of ethics and give undivided loyalty to the Government and country, adding their welfare would continue to be given attention.

On foreign relations, he said the Government would maintain a proactive policy as an extension of the country's development programme, with priority to be given to reinforcing bilateral relations with all neighbours, especially Asean countries, the Organisation of Islamic Conference and countries of the South.

Earlier, the King and Raja Permaisuri Agong Tuanku Siti Aishah were received on arrival at Parliament Square by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, his wife Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, Cabinet Ministers, Deputy Ministers and MPs.

After the *Negaraku* was played followed by a 21-gun salute, the King inspected a guard of honour mounted by 107 officers and men from the Royal Malay Regiment under the command of Meja Abu Samah Mat Nor.