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Mahathir-Students

LOOK EAST POLICY STILL RELEVANT, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

By: D.Arul Rajoo

OSAKA, Jan 19 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that the Look East Policy that was introduced in the early 1980s is still relevant although Japan is now facing persistent economic problems.

The prime minister said he still considered Japan a model which should be emulated by Malaysia, especially its capability in high technology and its work culture which stresses discipline and diligence.

"Japan rose from the ruins of World War II to become an economic giant. It is facing problems today because it is too eager to follow the Western way quickly," he said in reply to a question at a dialogue with some 100 Malaysian students here.

Dr Mahathir said his visit to Sharp Corporation today showed how advanced Japanese technology was and it was not found anywhere else in the world.

He urged Malaysian students in Japan who got jobs with Japanese companies on returning home to take the initiative to venture into business or small- and medium-scale industries (SMIs).

Dr Mahathir said the government was willing to help them start business with the experience and knowledge they gained while working with Japanese companies.

"We will try to help by attracting Japanese SMI to go into joint ventures with our companies. Let's start on a small-scale because the capital will also be small," he said.

Dr Mahathir said he had visited backyard industries in Tokyo before to see how Malaysians, especially Bumiputeras who are still behind in business, could be involved in such industries.

At the dialogue lasting more than two hours, Dr Mahathir also explained the measures taken by the government to overcome the recent economic downturn and the responsibility of students to help develop the country upon graduation.

Asked on the negative impact of being too dependent on foreign direct investment (FDI), Dr Mahathir said FDI was required for capital and to create work opportunities.

He was confident that local companies were capable of producing goods comparable to those made by foreign companies in the future.

The economic downturn would not affect Malaysia's efforts to achieve developed status by 2020 because the rapid growth of the past and in the future would help realise the Vision 2020, he said.

He agreed with a student's suggestion that Malaysians, especially businessmen and those in the service sector, should learn the Japanese culture of respecting all clients regardless of their status.

"We should introduce this method because Malaysians are quite rigid when dealing with others. Adopt the good culture like hard work and courtesy," he said.

To a question on the lack of academic books in Bahasa Malaysia, he said this happened because there were not enough translators and students should therefore improve their command of English.

To a question on whether Malaysian engineers benefited from the purchase of the Lotus company by Proton, Dr Mahathir said they definitely did because they had produced many designs, including for the latest Proton model, Waja.

He also said although more institutions of higher learning had been set

up in Malaysia, the government would continue to send some students overseas as many fields were continuing to expand.

-- BERNAMA

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