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Abdullah-Unity

OPP3 ONLY ATTAINABLE IN A UNITED, STABLE AND PEACEFUL SOCIETY, SAYS DPM

KUALA LUMPUR, April 7 (Bernama) -- The Third Outline Perspective Plan (OPP3) can only be attained if there is a united, stable and peaceful society, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said today.

"Without such a starting point no amount of good planning will be able to uplift quality of life or productivity...if our society is plagued by tension and violence brought about by ethnic strife, religious intolerance or socio-economic deprivations, there is no point talking about K-economy and enabling technologies," he said.

He said Malaysia must ensure that there was unity fostered by the continued tradition of social justice so that no group was left behind by economic development.

"This will mean that we would have to refocus our eradication of poverty strategy to take into account the growing number of urban poor made up of people from all races and this problem needs to be addressed quickly, effectively and compassionately," he said when launching the Youth Summit 2001 at Universiti Malaya here.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad tabled the OPP3 in parliament on Monday. The plan forms the strategic direction for managing the Malaysian economy over the next 10 years, laying down the general principles for economic development and nation-building.

Abdullah, who is also Home Minister, said if the problem of the urban poor was not addressed then the country risks the possibility of ethnic tension and even violence as seen in the most unfortunate incidents over the past month in Petaling Jaya.

"This will also mean that we have to continue with our affirmative action that will level up the Malays economically," he said, adding that the implementation of the OPP3 would be improved so that greater emphasis was given to those who were in genuine need of assistance.

"We do not want to encourage the Malays to be dependent on the government...if our aim is to create a critical mass of skilled professional workers, we must uproot the subsidy mentality among the Malays and this affirmative action must be seen as a step up not as a lifelong lifeline," said Abdullah.

He said the government's commitment to fostering unity cannot be underestimated as it believes that without national unity the essential premise for success in a globalised world would be absent.

The deputy prime minister said with this in mind the government proposed the Vision School which could revive student integration at schools.

"If you grow up in isolation, without getting to know one another, it is quite likely that by the time you reach university, you will find it difficult to interact with students from different races," he said.

Abdullah noted that the level of polarisation in the country's universities was a gravely worrying trend and if left unchecked it would spill over into the rest of society.

"The muhibah (goodwill) spirit is in danger of becoming something that is meaningless, or at the very best a front that is put on only during certain occasions such as Hari Merdeka or any of the major religious festivals.

"If national unity is treated with such nonchalance, I fear that our dreams of creating a united society will be unattainable," he said.

He said the younger generation must have the resolve and commitment to solve "our own problems" and carry out the country's strategies.

"Not only do I hope that you will succeed in pursuing excellence, I hope that you will open your minds to the realities around us...I do not want the younger generation to be closed minded and unexposed," Abdullah said.

He said this attitude would only breed intolerance and reactionary responses and the people should always be on constant guard against the use of religion or ideology to turn attention away from the key task at hand, which was to prepare for globalisation.

He said in this age of modern technology, the pervasive mass media and rapid development of the country, people should not forget that "we are and remain Malaysians".

"The flame of patriotism can never and should never be extinguished," he said, adding that globalisation would not mean that there would be a big global village where everyone would be citizens of the world.

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