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Mahathir-Africa

POLITICAL INDEPENDENCE NOT ENOUGH TO DEVELOP A NATION, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, April 19 (Bernama) -- Political independence and economic resources alone will not be enough to develop and bring progress to a country, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

What was more important was the ability to exploit and extract the resources for the wellbeing of all the people, he said.

Citing Africa as an example, Dr Mahathir said the continent of 53 countries had huge economic resources such as minerals but still had a lot of problems like poverty and political instability.

He said many African countries, along with Asia, achieved independence after World War Two hoping that they would be masters of their own destinies.

"But we soon learn that having political independence will not give us anything, unless we learn how to develop our country and achieve economic independence," he said at the Young African Leadership and Intellectual Dialogue at the Putra World Trade Centre here.

The dialogue is organised by the African Students Society in Malaysia in collaboration with Umno Youth.

Dr Mahathir said that unlike political independence, which was not so difficult to achieve by various means like negotiations, wars and subversion, economic independence was a different case altogether.

"But to achieve economic independence is totally different. Actually requires greater discipline... discipline that will force us to relegate to the background our own needs and personal ambitions.

"We have to think instead to give first place to the needs of our country and people. If we can achieve that discipline then that will be the beginning of the achievement of economic independence," he said.

The prime minister said that to develop a country also needed a good administration and the administrative skills which Malaysia had inherited since independence.

Unlike Malaysia, many other countries had achieved their independence by guerilla warfare or other means, he said.

Dr Mahathir said that because the independence was achieved by means of war and violence, the political transition of these countries was not easy and many were not able to handle the administration of their country very well.

"By and large, many countries with huge resources were not able to make the kind of progress they were supposed to. So we have to look back now... pause and reconsider," he said, adding that as such, the present young generation had a greater responsibility to their country.

"They have to learn that it is not the popularity that you need but the ability to administer a country and develop it," he said.

Malaysia, he said, decided to follow the Japanese model to progress and had introduced the "Look East Policy".

He said the developing countries must sacrifice and learn from others besides discarding some of the traditions which did not contribute to their progress.

He said Malaysia also embraced the Malaysia Incorporated concept so as to create a closer relationship between the government and the private sector for the overall wellbeing of the nation, although some Western countries had criticised this practice, saying that it had given place to cronyism.

"The important lesson ... (we) should not always look at traditional sources to guide us. (We) should look elsewhere to see if there is anything to guide us," he said.

He said Malaysia believed in helping and prospering other countries, including those that were already prosperous and this would have mutual benefit in terms of trading and tourism, among others.

He said Malaysia had proven its commitment to Africa with its investment and through other avenues such as the Langkawi International Dialogue and the Southern African International Dialogue (Said), forums to discuss smart partnerships and exchange of experiences with southern African countries

He advised the young and future leaders of Africa to "take what is good and reject what is bad for their country".

-- BERNAMA

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