

Dr M: Govt studying honorary citizenships

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PETALING JAYA: The government is studying the possibility of conferring honorary citizenships on people who are willing to contribute to the Malaysian economy, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

The move is to encourage more foreigners to settle down in Malaysia and contribute towards the economy and other fields.

Speaking after opening a seminar on "Learning from Korea" at Sunway Convention Centre in Sunway Pyramid yesterday, the prime minister said Malaysia is thinking of following in the footsteps of some countries with a similar programme.

"Many countries confer honorary citizenships on people who contribute to their well-being, so we are

thinking of doing the same."

Later at a press conference, Mahathir was asked to elaborate on the subject raised by a participant at a dialogue session during the seminar.

The participant had asked whether the government would be more responsive in giving permanent resident status to Korean businessmen who want to stay and work in Malaysia.

In his reply, Mahathir said Malaysia is prepared to study individual cases and would admit people if there is merit.

"Of course, we would be very grateful and more responsive if people come here with something to offer."

However, he said the proposal would not be similar to the Business Migration programme offered by Australia.

"We are still studying it. We have to see whether any

legal amendments as well as other provisions pertaining to the move are needed."

On whether honorary citizenship will be given to those who contribute in non-economic fields, he said: "We can be flexible, we'll see whether people can do something that is good for Malaysia."

He said the government, at the moment, has not thought about imposing any quota on the number of foreigners to be granted honorary citizenship.

Asked whether the frequent changes in the country's educational system have led the country to fall back in terms of achievement and success, Mahathir said when an education system is not credible it is necessary to make some changes.

"Changes to the education system are failure corrections to avoid further failures in future."

The prime minister said he personally dislikes making these changes but they are unavoidable.

To a question on the role of the media in nation-building, Mahathir said: "They can play a terrific role provided they are balanced and fair."

He said the media can stimulate the economy and the people into doing the right things, but they sometimes tend to focus on controversial issues as they want to sell their magazines or advertisement space.

"When they become self-centred, they are no better than the people they criticise," he said.

"We need people to be rational and fair to ensure the success of our country."

Mahathir said the Malaysian media will be as bad as that of many other countries if they play the role of disrupting a peaceful society.