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Mahathir-Freedom

ABSOLUTE FREEDOM LEADS TO ANARCHY, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 9 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that there can never be absolute freedom because such liberty will lead to anarchy.

He said that history had taught society to understand that anarchy and unrest lead to a lowering in living standards, induce poverty and produce misery.

Unless the government places limited restrictions to certain rights, he said, individuals could abuse these rights and create moral degradation such as killing unborn and young children.

He said that rights must always be seen in the larger context of the quality of life for the community and not just pegged on the ideals of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights "which even the United Nations has not been able to effectively implement".

"The Western concept of rights differs from that of Asian countries. While the West places the rights of the individual before the interests of the group or society, Asian culture places society above self," he said when opening the Conference on Human Rights and Education organised by the Malaysian Human Rights Commission (Suhakam) here.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Datuk Seri Dr Rais Yatim represented and read Dr Mahathir's speech at the two-day conference at the Putra World Trade Centre.

Dr Mahathir said that laws like the Internal Security Act, which have vehemently been condemned by the West, were necessary to safeguard the nation's security and provide protection for the vast majority.

He said that political unrest, lack of national security and threats to one's safety would not only keep investors away but would also reduce productivity immensely.

"I wonder how many of us prefer to live in a country troubled by internal conflicts and violence to one that is harmonious and safe. Proponents of human rights insist on the indivisibility of human rights. Show me a country that is able to sustain an adequate standard of living without maintaining law and order," said Dr Mahathir.

Dr Mahathir said that while certain quarters might view the Federal Constitution differently, certain fundamental liberties were enshrined in part II of the Constitution such as right of citizens to sue their government and the right to vote besides ordinary laws that provide protection of human rights such as the Aboriginal Peoples Act and Employment Act.

As such, Dr Mahathir said that compared to many nations, Malaysia remains in the forefront in the line-up of safeguarding human rights where the country was the third nation to institute a national human rights commission among Asean countries.

The Prime Minister said that since independence, achievement had been made in many areas of development such as health, education, poverty eradication and human resources development.

Malaysia's healthcare, especially maternal and children, is among the best in the world where in 1999, the infant mortality rate was eight per 1000 and for children between one to four years, the mortality rate is only 0.4 per cent and in August 2000, Malaysia was declared polio free, he said.

On education, he said that in spite of providing free but not compulsory primary education, more than 2.9 million or 99.9 per cent of the

seven-year-olds were in schools and girls have equal access to education with 49 per cent of primary schoolchildren being girls.

Dr Mahahir also said that from next year onwards, primary schooling is compulsory for all children.

Dr Mahathir said that the government has gone a step further in ensuring that all pre-school children have access to quality pre-school education and from next year, all kindergartens, whether private, government or quasi-government were required to use the national pre-school curriculum which has been designed to help children acquire skills to prepare them for formal education in Year One.

He said that to increase accessibility and to improve the performance of rural children, especially those in the interiors of Sabah and Sarawak, more centralised schools would be constructed in remote areas and measures would be implemented to ensure the provision of adequate teaching and learning materials, infrastructure and trained teachers in rural schools.

Dr Mahathir said that the teacher training curriculum would also be reviewed, not only to give emphasis on the utilisation of ICT and creative teaching methods but also to stress on the importance of ethics and moral values.

"Suhakam can properly work with the Ministry of Education and the Human Resources Ministry to achieve this goal of creating a caring culture. Hopefully a smart partnership between Suhakam and these two ministries will be an outcome of this conference," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that the government views education as a very important tool for development and under the Eighth Malaysia Plan, 20.6 per cent of the total development allocation is assigned to education and training programmes, giving the two areas the major share of the allocation for the social sector which is 34.1 per cent compared to security sector, which is only 9.8 per cent.

Dr Mahathir said that the government had not only signed but had also ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child and attempted to comply with this Article by requiring each housing estate to set aside land for children's playgrounds, providing public facilities for family outings, instituting two non-working Saturdays per month in the public service and building libraries.

"Parents also have the freedom to choose the cultural activities for their children to participate in. Unfortunately, many parents regard recreation and leisure as worthless for their children," he said.

On poverty, the prime minister said the government had targeted to reduce the problem by addressing pockets of poverty, especially the minority groups in remote areas.

He said the construction of low- and medium-cost houses would continue to be a commitment of the government and efforts to increase the quality of life included measures to improve air and water quality, efficient management of waste, development of a healthy urban environment and conservation of critical natural habitats and resources.

"The government has taken measures to improve the quality of life of all Malaysians, not just that of the hardcore poor," he said.

He said the government wanted Malaysians to be happy and to enjoy an adequate standard of living.

"While each individual should know his or her rights, everyone should also be cognizant of the rights of others and the nation and respect their rights," he said.

In the wider context, Dr Mahathir said, some countries preached lofty tenets of rights while at the same time "they are at liberty unilaterally to declare war on others without even having to abide by the very standards of international law.

"The right of might has surfaced in place of the right to deliberate via accepted international norms," he said.

-- BERNAMA

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