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PM: Bumiputera entrepreneurs too dependent

PETALING JAYA, Tues. - A majority of Bumiputera entrepreneurs, especially contractors, are on a "total-dependence on the government" mode, so much so that they cannot even compete among themselves, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said their market was the Government - the "Government market" and not open market.

"They need government orders to do business... this is not what business is all about," he told participants of the 2002 Women Entrepreneurs National Convention here today.

The event is organised by the Entrepreneur Development Ministry.

Dr Mahathir said to survive in the business world, entrepreneurs had no choice but to learn the ropes of the trade.

"There is no easy way to do business. It will take time to be profitable and we must be patient and willing to learn the vital aspects of doing business.

"You must be well-versed in financial management, administration and, most importantly, you must inculcate the necessary values and business cultures," he added.

He said that it was also vital for entrepreneurs to study the needs of the market, especially the quality and presentation style of products.

Speaking at a Press conference later, Dr Mahathir reiterated the need for Bumiputera businessmen to operate in the open market, rather than depend on government contracts.

"Among the Bumiputera contractors, for instance, almost 100 per cent, I think, depend on government contracts. When there are no government projects, they're not competitive enough (in the open market).

"Even when it involves government contracts, they would prefer to deal through direct-negotiations rather than compete with others, even among other Bumiputera contractors," he said.

He warned that such incompetencies would not contribute in any way towards their development, be it to attain skills or improve quality.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Finance Minister, said that no doubt the Government supported Bumiputera entrepreneurs, but they should avoid being sucked into the dependency culture.

"We cannot depend on the Government for everything. We must depend on our own ability... the right culture and work ethics to succeed," he said, when replying to a media query on his speech.

To another question, he said that the Government had been trying hard to reduce Bumiputera entrepreneurs' dependence on government projects, but such initiatives did not go down well among them.

"That is exactly what we are trying to do, but they complain that they are being discriminated against," he said, with a pinch of sarcasm.

He added that skills alone, without proper business culture, could breed criminals as individuals with the wrong culture or practices would have the tendency to misuse power and position.

Dr Mahathir was also asked if he was happy with the achievement of women in the business sector, to which he replied: "Well, I am never happy, but I think they have done very well.

"Looks like they are better than the men," he said, adding that they were gradually proving themselves in various fields.

To another question, the Prime Minister said that he had no objection if

the people chose to have a women Deputy Prime Minister.

"It's okay, if the people want to... they can elect a woman. I have no objections, even if (they) want to become Prime Minister too... it's okay," he said.