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Fear over Bumi development lag

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BANGI, Tues. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today expressed fear that Bumiputeras would be unable to enjoy a better standard of living in a developed Malaysia if they continued to ignore the necessity to master knowledge and skills.

The Prime Minister said the Bumiputeras would be left behind even after Malaysia attains a developed nation status if such ignorance persisted, especially among the younger generation.

"We want to be a developed nation one day, but we do not want to see a situation where we are developed but the majority of the rakyat are not able to enjoy the fruits of development because of a lack of capability.

"We know that the Bumiputeras are not in any way inferior than the other races but the problem is that the number of Bumiputeras who are interested in pursuing the necessary knowledge and skills is very limited," Dr Mahathir said in his speech at the opening of the Malaysia-France Institute (MFI) here.

MFI is an advanced skills training institute set up by the governments of Malaysia and France.

Mara is the local partner while the French Government provides soft loans for the purchase of equipment and supports technical expertise through a technology provider company, Bocard.

Speaking before hundreds of MFI students, lecturers and foreign dignitaries, Dr Mahathir said that the Government had the necessary funds to create training institutions.

But he lamented that merely creating such institutions would not help if there was no interest among the people, especially the Bumiputeras, to make use of such opportunities.

Dr Mahathir said that to close the gap between the Bumiputeras and the non-Bumiputeras, the Government had set up Mara whose function was to develop the Bumiputeras.

Just after Independence, the Government had discovered that the Bumiputera and non-Bumiputera gap in terms of skills and ability was glaring.

This gap, Dr Mahathir said, had caused the Bumiputeras to assume that tasks requiring mechanical or technical skills could only be performed by the other races.

"This conception has been proven wrong because if you train hard enough and learn the necessary skills, anybody can succeed," he said, adding that the younger generation should appreciate the opportunities placed at their feet now.

"This is what we call upward mobility, if our parents were from the lower ranks of society earning meagre incomes, we hope the younger generation would break free and attain the necessary skills and knowledge ...you must aim high!"

Thanking the French Government for its support and contributions in setting up MFI, Dr Mahathir said the nation was in dire need of knowledge and skilled workers.

"If they acquire high-paying jobs due to their ability, this would also contribute towards our economic development."

Also present today were Entrepreneur Development Minister Datuk Seri Nazri Aziz, MFI chairman Datuk Mohd Mydin Sheriff, Selangor Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Mohd Khir Toyo and French Ambassador to Malaysia Xavier

Driencourt.