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Mahathir-Protection

MALAYS MUST RISE TO THE CHALLENGE OF REDUCED PROTECTION, SAYS PM

KUALA LUMPUR, June 20 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today that if the Malays can withstand challenges posed by the current experiment of withdrawing certain protection for them, the government may consider reducing further such protection.

The Prime Minister said that it was a misperception on the part of the Malays to think that the protection they now enjoyed from the government was an honour.

"At the present moment, we are trying out some kind of an experiment by withdrawing some of the protection. We want to see whether they would be able to withstand the competition or not.

"Obviously, if they prove themselves able, then we can think of maybe reducing further the protection," he told a news conference at the end of the first day of the Umno annual general assembly here.

Dr Mahathir said this in response to questions surrounding affirmative action policies aimed at uplifting the Bumiputeras and how to create a more competitive Malay race.

To a question, Dr Mahathir said he could not predict until when such policies would go on.

Certain Malay groups and individuals have expressed uneasiness over the government's decision to allocate a 10 per cent quota to non-Bumiputera students in Mara Junior Science Colleges (MRSMs) and matriculation programmes.

They claimed that this could erode the special rights of Malay students and the community.

Dr Mahathir also said other strategies could be used to make the Malays more competitive in the economic field.

"For example, we may try (to have) competition just among themselves to see who will surface, who is successful.

"Then, of course, once they have learned to compete among themselves we may want them to compete with others. There are many ways of doing these things. We have a lot of ideas," he said.

When pointed out that there were Umno members who did not agree to the quota allocation, Dr Mahathir said he did not expect each of the three million Umno members to share the same opinion or give the same response.

"What's important is to explain the objective of implementing the policy. Secondly, we need to determine they are capable of achieving success," he said.

However, Dr Mahathir expressed confidence that they would be convinced based on previous experiences including the national car project and turning Langkawi into a duty-free island, both of which received initial resistance but later proven to be successful.

When suggested that his policy speech when opening the assembly might come across as harsh to the Malays, the prime minister said he did not think that his speech was "brutal".

"I tried to be honest. I only spoke the truth. That's why the title of the speech is exposing what is already known (Exposing the Exposed). I wasn't telling anything new.

"(I was) just repeating what everybody knows but what most people will prefer not to say. I don't have any inhibitions. I say what I feel like saying," he said.

Asked whether he expected any backlash from the community arising from

his no holds-barred speech, Dr Mahathir said: "There will be good response and bad response. That's normal.

"But I have always said I never seek popularity. I seek to speak the truth. I have survived for 21 years, not bad for someone who always sound very nasty," he said in jest.

Asked why his speech did not touch at all on the education issues, including the 10 per cent issue, Dr Mahathir said: "Sometimes, we want to say something, not necessarily we need to say it directly.

"If we read the speech thoroughly, I think we can understand the contents in terms of education policy," he added.

-- BERNAMA

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