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Musa Hitam: Review education system every 10 to 15 years

PETALING JAYA, Wed. - Former Malaysian Human Rights Commission (Suhakam) chairman Tan Sri Musa Hitam has suggested that the education system be reviewed every 10 to 15 years to determine its effectiveness in uniting the people and contributing towards the country's development.

Musa, who served as Education Minister between 1978 and 1981, said education was an instrument that helped cement national unity in multi-racial Malaysia.

"The Government now faces challenges in ensuring the effectiveness of education in not only preserving national unity, but also in launching Malaysia in the challenging global village," he said in a lecture on Positioning Business in a Changing Political Scenario at Wisma FMM.

Some 100 people from the business community attended today's lecture, which was part of the "Special Lecture Series" organised by the Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers (FMM). Also present were FMM president Jen (rtd) Tan Sri Zain Hashim and FMM vice-president Datuk Paul Low.

Musa, who is also a former Deputy Prime Minister, likened the proposed review to the regular exercise done by the Election Commission in reviewing the re-delineation of electoral boundaries once every 10 years.

Musa, at present adjunct professor at Universiti Utara Malaysia, also expressed concern about the current education system in the country that created division between the Malays and non-Malays.

He said almost 90 per cent of students in public-funded universities were Malays while the non-Malays filled the seats at private colleges, which have superior resources, including twinning programmes with foreign universities.

According to him, there was a tendency for undergraduates in public universities to resort to Islamic extremism when frustrated with inadequate resources at the universities.

"I personally view that the best approach to see the effectiveness of education in contributing to national unity and development is to establish a system where in every 10 or 15 years, we do a review on the education policy. Through the feedback received during the review, we can come out with strategies to improve."

He also warned that education could be used as a "political football" by racial-based political parties.

Musa, who now sits on the board of several companies, said the Government's efforts to improve the country's political, economic and social landscapes since independence in 1957 had made Malaysia one of the most successful nations among developing countries.

"We managed to create a large middle-class in the country, which is the stabilising factor in political and economic situations."

He credited stable politics for the significant improvement in the business environment and positive flow of foreign direct investment (FDI) into the country.

"If there is no political will from the Government, no political vision among the leadership and no political determination of those in power to ensure stability, peace and harmony, the business will not be able to flourish as it has now."

Musa said the more than 20 years' leadership of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had contributed a lot to the country's development.

He also assured the business community that there would not be any change in the business-friendliness of the Government and its development policies after Dr Mahathir retires in October next year.

On religious extremism, Musa said the Government could use the same principles it adopted when fighting Communism, which was through prosperity, happiness and poverty eradication.