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Mahathir-Attitude

DR MAHATHIR CALLS FOR CHANGE IN ATTITUDE

KUALA LUMPUR, June 19 (Bernama) -- In line with his unstinting commitment to enhance the status of Malaysians, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today called for a change in attitude.

The prime minister said that a change in attitude was essential because the the policy and strategy designed for the management of the economy and finances require the understanding and cooperation of the people.

The people cannot behave like people who were already rich when Malaysia was still a developing country, he said in his policy speech at the 54th Umno general assembly at the Putra World Tarde Centre (PWTC) here.

He cited the action of the people in the country, which is 10 times poorer than the developed countries, over their protest against the proposed RM1.5 billion incinerator because it allegedly would produce toxic gasses.

"We have become so arrogant that the acceptable level of pollution of people who are 10 times richer than us is not good enough for us," he said.

He said that Malaysia, not yet rich, cannot even enjoy the same standards as the developed countries but the people now demand standards higher than the developed countries.

"Believe me, if we behave in this manner we will not be more safe and healthy, but we will suffer from it," he said.

Dr Mahathir, who is Umno president, said that the government proposed to build a most modern, more clean than many found in Japan and other developed countries and place it far from residential areas and the safety of the people was ensured because there would be no fly-ash which would pollute the air.

In Japan, he said, ordinary incinerators were so clean that they could be built in the middle of residential areas and no one protested, the residents using the incineration plant as a place for recreation, swimming clubs and other activities.

The people pay a high rate for their incinerators, he said.

"We cannot behave like people who are already rich when we are still a developing country," he said.

He said that some people who demand first class facilities but were prepared to pay only third class rates.

"If we want first class things we must pay first class prices," he said.

Malaysia, he said, was able to have certain facilities only and the people should be willing to pay slightly more when facilities they use were better and cost more.

In economic matter, he said, the country's strategy was to live within its means, not to borrow too much, and manage its development according to its financial capacity and needs.

The prime minister said that Malaysia's approach was to ensure that while its costs were competitive, its standard of living would not be too low.

Today, the country's per capita income is US\$4,000 but with this income the people could buy goods and services worth about US\$9,000 in the United States.

On the other hand, he said, Luxembourg for example has a per capita income of US\$44,000, 11 times higher than Malaysia's but purchasing power is only US\$27,000 or only three times than that in Malaysia because the

cost of living in Luxembourg was higher than in the US.

In the 46 years of independence, he said, Malaysia's per capita income increased from US\$300 to US\$4,000 and clearly, Malaysians were now richer than before independence and should be prepared to pay more for the better goods and services they now get.

The wages in Malaysia may be low compared to those in the developed countries but they have not caused the people's standard of living to fall, he said.

He said that in many instances the public facilities were the same as in developed countries but the cost to the people using these facilities was less than half those in developed countries.

For example, Malaysians pay only RM7 to cross the Penang Bridge whereas the Japanese pay RM500 to use a shorter bridge, he said.

The prime minister said that the government can raise wages but if the increase was not balanced by an increase in productivity, the country would become uncompetitive.

With that there would be no more new investments and the existing investments may move to other countries while job opportunities would be reduced and many would be unemployed, he said.

In this situation, he said, there cannot be any more increase in wages as the number of workers exceeds the job opportunities.

The prime minister said that there were people who believe that wage increase could be obtained through industrial action like what was done in Europe but the European economy does not grow like Malaysia and there was more unemployment than here.

"We need our own approach and strategy. We cannot follow the European way blindly. But there are Malaysians who like to follow European ways and those people who are already rich. They don't take into consideration the country's level of development and our financial capacity. They like us to be spendthrifts and borrow money," he said.

Dr Mahathir said that if the government, in the desire to be popular, were to accede to their big spending demands, it was possible that Malaysia would become like some developing countries and would not be able to pay its foreign debts, becoming bankrupt and would be under the direction of international agencies.

Dr Mahathir also criticised the attitude of some Malays and Bumiputeras who have become too dependent and could only do business with the government.

"Without the government, without the NEP (New Economic policy) they will collapse. This threatens the future of the Malays and the Bumiputeras, Malaysians and our beloved country," he said.

-- BERNAMA

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