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MAHATHIR-CHINESE

BE MORE VISIBLE IN NATION-BUILDING, DR MAHATHIR TELLS OVERSEAS CHINESE

PETALING JAYA, July 28 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has called on overseas Chinese to be more visible in the nation-building process of their host country.

"Whenever possible, they should have true partnerships with locals," he said when opening the 7th World Chinese Entrepreneurs convention here today.

As for the locals, Dr Mahathir said they must on their part make serious attempts to learn and acquire the business and entrepreneurial skills of the Chinese.

"This will help to correct the long-held view of overseas Chinese, biased perhaps by the behaviour of earlier ways of emigrants, who appeared to be more focused on enhancing their wealth than they are on contributing to the socio-economic development of the host country," he said.

However, he said that there could be no doubt the Chinese had contributed much towards making what Malaysia is today.

Dr Mahathir said overseas Chinese had contributed to wealth creation of these countries because of their entrepreneurship, their willingness to take risks and their quick appreciation of the needs of the places that they migrated to.

"They literally see what the locals fail to see, the opportunities which abound," he said.

But being sensitive to local conditions and the need to ensure that a good environment exists for business in these countries, he said the overseas Chinese must work closely with the indigenous people and help to reduce the economic disparities between them and the locals.

It would contribute to fair sharing of the wealth released by Chinese entrepreneurship besides preventing the kind of incidents that seem to be common in many countries of South East Asia for example, whenever bad times come.

In Malaysia, the Prime Minister said the relationship between the Malays and Chinese was symbiotic - both gaining from each other's specialised role.

"While the Malays provide a good, if not perfect administration, the Chinese have provided the entrepreneurship and the business skills to enrich the country," he said.

Some, he said, would say it was cronyism between the ruling indigenous elites and the Chinese tycoons, but then the number of Chinese who succeeded without knowing government leaders or officers were many.

It is thus impossible for the rich and the generous to remain in obscurity, he said.

In Malaysia, Dr Mahathir said the government did not try to assimilate the Chinese or the Indians into the indigenous community but its approach had always been one of integration.

"Racial clashes hardly ever happen in Malaysia although there could be tensions at times," he said.

Elaborating on the success of overseas Chinese globally, he said in May 2000, there were 34 million Chinese residing in 140 countries and this had increased to 60 million in 2002, according to a study.

With an estimated wealth of more than US\$1.5 trillion, overseas Chinese constitute the third largest economy in the world after the gross national products (GNPs) of United States and Japan.

Asia, he said, has the largest overseas Chinese population at 28 million, followed by the Americas at 3.5 million, Europe 1.6 million, Oceania 571,000 and Africa 137,000.

Dr Mahathir said going by the numbers and the wealth, some political observers and economists have opined that the overseas Chinese could hold sway over the global economy.

But, he said China itself had never tried to shape the international financial and economic regimes in order to ensure Chinese economic dominance of the world.

Far from trying to dominate and restructure the systems of the world, the overseas Chinese have tried to maintain a low profile.

With no protection from China, he said the overseas Chinese had always been sensitive to the question of their political and economic loyalty to the countries where they had settled.

Still their success and wealth have been the cause of much envy and jealousy on the part of the indigenous people causing outbreaks of violence in which they were the target, but still many opted to stay in the countries of their adoption.

Despite being citizens of these countries, they have maintained their identity and remained largely loyal to their clan and family links.

They form a natural global network which facilitates their doing business worldwide.

Together with their links with the emerging economic super power that China has proven to be, the opportunities available to the world's Chinese entrepreneurs are truly limitless, the Prime Minister said. -- BERNAMA

SHO KTC