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Mahathir-Leadership

LEADERS SHOULD BE WILLING TO TAKE RISK, SAYS DR M

PUTRAJAYA, June 9 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said tonight a good leadership entails the willingness to explore the non-conventional and go for the unbeaten path.

"Leadership means to me doing something extraordinary, something off the beaten track. Sometimes, you'll fall but you'll have to clamber back up again," he said at the Asia Inc Forum, focusing on leadership for Southeast Asia.

He said people must also be ready to question everything that was conventional or normal by which things were done each time.

Citing the example of how Malaysia managed to deal with the 1997/98 financial crisis, Dr Mahathir said what the country simply did was it re-examined the situation and formulated a new direction that it should take to overcome the difficulties then.

Dr Mahathir, who plans to leave office in October, said if a leader followed the same direction as everybody else, then he would merely be a follower and not much could be said about his leadership.

Dr Mahathir also said it was time for Southeast Asia to think for itself including by "not doing what is expected of you".

At a dialogue session later, he fielded questions on issues such as leadership qualities, the pros and cons of democracy and the way the war against terror was being waged by the United States.

The prime minister said one of the most difficult decisions he had to make involved finding ways to stop currency traders from inflicting damage on the country.

He said the formula adopted by the government to overcome the problem came about after a careful study of how currency trading was conducted.

On terrorism, Dr Mahathir said the way the war against terror being conducted now was all wrong.

He reiterated the need to address the root causes of the anger and hatred felt by Muslims in many parts of the world today, driving them to commit acts of terror.

"Find out what's bugging them. One of things they are angry about is the situation in Palestine where people are forced out of their land and made to live as refugees," he told his audience comprising top business and government leaders from the region as well as the United States and Australia.

Turning to the so-called regime change in Iraq ostensibly to install democracy following the recent US-led invasion there, Dr Mahathir said governments today were "frightened to death" over the prospect of such change in their own country.

"You can occupy a country but you cannot stop people who are angry from carrying out (terror) attacks," he said.

He also said the problem with Southeast Asia and many other developing countries was that democracy was a relatively new system for them compared to western countries.

"But now they are telling us that we must have democracy overnight, lest we'll come and institute a regime change," he said.

The forum, which ends tomorrow, discusses issues affecting the region and its implications for business and society.

Asia Inc Forum is part of The Edge Asia Inc group of companies which also publishes the regional magazine, Asia Inc and The Edge Singapore.

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