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Mahathir-Handrcraft

M'SIA CAN PRODUCE GOOD QUALITY HANDICRAFTS - DR M

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 1 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Malaysia can produce good quality and a variety of handicrafts, but the problem is always about mass producing them.

The Prime Minister said: "The market demand (for handicrafts) are for big numbers and to cater for that, the government is encouraging the setting up of small industries.

"We are dealing with the mass consumer market. We cannot do things the old way. That's why we need factories," he told reporters after visiting the Malaysian Handicraft Development Corporation (Kraftangan Malaysia) Complex here today.

Dr Mahathir said he once received an order for 10,000 walking sticks from an American after he showed him his Kubang Pasu-made walking stick during a visit to the United States.

However, the person who made the walking stick nearly fainted when Dr Mahathir conveyed the American's order as he could make only one or two walking sticks a year.

Dr Mahathir said: "The problem (with Malaysian handicraft makers) has always been the quantity of the products. We can make one or two, but that is not good enough for the market."

For that, efforts are being made to create well-planned cottage industries to involve villagers to work full-time in a move to indirectly boost their income and improve their standard of living, he said.

He said the government had no intention to make the cottage industries or the handicraft industry as an investment for certain individuals.

"We want people who can manage the industry, have some money and provide job opportunities to the villagers, they will receive salary and may own shares in the factory," he said.

Dr Mahathir said he had to explain this matter because there were local capitalists, including in Kubang Pasu, who felt that the government should not bring outsiders to their villages to set up factories because they could do it by themselves.

Dr Mahathir was also amazed at Kraftangan Malaysia's capability at producing quality handicrafts from local materials within a short time based on the examples of handicrafts that he had brought back from abroad.

"They (Kraftangan Malaysia) were able to make the products with better quality at a lower price," he said.

Dr Mahathir had asked Kraftangan Malaysia in April to study several handicrafts that he had brought back from abroad for the purpose of benchmarking and to come up with suitable creations.

Among the handicrafts that he had brought back were products made of bamboo and wood including "drift wood and discarded wood that have been turned into a unique bottle holder," he said.

For example, in Japan, the culture to open one's shoes before entering a house had created a demand for shoehorns which were very expensive and Kraftangan Malaysia was able to make shoehorns of the same quality and design at a more reasonable price, he said.

He said the handicrafts would be marketed at the Kompleks Kraf Kuala Lumpur to gauge their acceptability before distributing them to certain workshops in the villages and marketing them at tourist destinations.

Dr Mahathir was accompanied by his wife, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali and Deputy Minister of Entrepreneur Development Datuk Khalid

Yunus during the visit.

Responding to a question from a reporter whether it was necessary to check on the background of individuals applying for party membership, Dr Mahathir said it was very difficult to do so because the number of political party members was very large, reaching into the millions.

The question was raised based on the case of the former Persiaran Gurney (Penang) MCA branch head, Ong King Ee or better known as "Jackie Chan", who is believed to head the "Sio Sam Ong" triad.

He said the government only vetted the background of government servants where their names were sent for verification to the Anti-Corruption Agency, police and several other government agencies.

"We don't do a thorough check (on political parties members). We have millions of members and there is no way to check thoroughly everyone at the branches. We have to accept them.

"Sometimes they (at the branches) are very careless, and these things happen. What they should do now is to be careful in accepting new members," he said.

Dr Mahathir said: "We cannot know later on when they (the party members) come out to indulge in all kind of immoral activities like sodomy."

On the issue of former MCA president Datuk Seri Ling Liong Sik's son Hee Leong's ACA investigation on the latter's RM1.2 million corporate acquisition, the Prime Minister said let the ACA carry out the investigation.

"If we don't trust the ACA, who else do we want to trust. ACA has taken actions on many. Some are leaders in the parties and their cases were taken to courts," he said.

On DAP Chairman Lim Kit Siang's statement that he was informed by the ACA that the investigation on Ling had been closed, Dr Mahathir said for Kit Siang "everything is political."

"It is not a question of law, right or wrong," he said, adding that the matter could be the opposition's political issue in the next general election.

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