

06 AUG 2003

Mahathir-Patriotism

PATRIOTISM AMONG M'SIANS STILL HIGH, SAYS DR M

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 6 (Bernama) -- Patriotism and appreciation of the nation's independence among Malaysians have improved in recent years, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said tonight.

He said this was evident from the various activities and programmes organised by the people from all walks of life to express their appreciation and honour the independence spirit during the Merdeka Month celebrations every year.

"The patriotism spirit is higher now than in past decades. This is something very encouraging because when we forget about our good fortunes, we will not remember to defend our good lives," he said when opening an exhibition on the "Images and Voices of Independence" at Menara Maybank, here.

The exhibition, jointly organised by Maybank Bhd and Anugerah Galeri Sdn Bhd, is held in conjunction with the Merdeka Day celebrations.

A total of 107 artists are exhibiting their 107 arts work at the exhibition from tomorrow till Sept 5.

Independence-themed poems are also displayed at the exhibition.

Dr Mahathir said currently many countries and races had been colonised to the extent that the people were frustrated with their fate when they look at Malaysia which was independent and progressive.

"When you ask them what is the meaning of independence, to many of the people in these countries, independence is a normal thing," he said.

He said many Malaysians, especially those born after and few years before independence, do not know how the country was colonised and do not understand what is the meaning of colonisation.

"To many of them, independence was a normal thing because everyone was independent, but they do not know that to achieve independence, many people had to sacrifice and fight the British and negotiate with them," he said.

Dr Mahathir described as a "good move" Maybank's initiative to organise an exhibition to commemorate the country's independence.

He said more such efforts should be made to remind ourselves the prosperity enjoyed living in an independent nation.

Without valuing the nation's struggle for independence, the people and the country would not have attained the level of progress and success being savoured now, he said.

Alluding to the Maybank Group's success to accumulate assets worth RM149.6 billion last year from RM14.3 billion in 1982, he said the success might not have been possible if Malaysia was still colonised.

"Maybank's assets did not grow just like that without the bank facing problems. Maybank faced a lot of problems and tribulations to the extent that at one point, it had to be bailed out by the government," he said.

Dr Mahathir said while he was grateful that the Malaysia's biggest bank was no longer owned by its original proprietor, the present owner had managed the bank so efficiently that it had emerged as the country's biggest bank.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Finance Minister, said Maybank had very good growth potential and could compete with foreign banks when the country had to "open its borders" due to globalisation and trade liberalisation.

He hoped the "Images and Voices of Independence" exhibition could imbue the spirit of independence and the people's appreciation for the country's independence and collect donations for the Warriors' Day Appeal Fund.

At the function, Dr Mahathir received RM200,000 from the Maybank Group for the fund.

He also visited the exhibition booths.

Present were Deputy Defence Minister Datuk Mohd Shafie Apdal, Bank Negara Governor Tan Sri Dr Zeti Akhtar Aziz, Maybank Chairman Tan Sri Mohamed Basir Ahmad and the bank's top management officials.

-- BERNAMA

HS RW TS