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Abdullah-Students

FUTURE DEPENDS ON QUALITY DECISIONS OF M'SIANS WHO ARE NOW STUDENTS

By: Azman Ujang

WELLINGTON, March 30 (Bernama) -- Whether or not Malaysia can achieve its goal of becoming a developed country by 2020 depends on the quality of decisions to be made by Malaysians who are now students, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said here Wednesday.

Fifteen years had passed since then prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad first announced the "Vision 2020" that aims to catapult Malaysia into a developed nation and the next 15 would indeed be fraught with arduous challenges and fierce competition that would require the country to develop a much higher level of human capital, he told over 100 Malaysian students from various New Zealand universities.

Abdullah, who arrived in the New Zealand capital city this evening for a three-day visit, said he realised that without knowledge and disciplined workers imbued with integrity and patriotism, Malaysia would not be able to achieve a developed country status and this had prompted him to give far more emphasis to the development of the human capital.

"It seems only yesterday that Dr Mahathir first announced the Vision 2020 plan but actually it's already 15 years and we have now come to the next period of 15 years before we reach 2020.

"We need to work really hard and we rely on those who are studying now to step into the very important role for the next 10 to 15 years, whether they are working for the government, the private sector or are self-employed," he said.

"It is these people who are going to make very, very important decisions for their companies, the government and for Malaysia.

"The quality of your decisions is very important. We certainly need better policies and better implementation in our country. I urge you to take advantage of your being here in New Zealand where the quality of education is very good," the prime minister said.

Abdullah also told the students to prepare themselves to undertake their future tasks and perform the roles and functions awaiting them in Malaysia so that they could all contribute to the country's development and future.

He reiterated that he placed a much higher premium on the agricultural sector to create new wealth and income for Malaysians in the future and Malaysian students in New Zealand would be in a better position to help modernise and turn agriculture into a more dynamic sector back home, given New Zealand's world-class infrastructure in agriculture.

"Through the convergence of bio-technology and information and communication technology (ICT), the potentials for agriculture in Malaysia are tremendous," he said.

The prime minister said that contrary to popular belief, agriculture in Malaysia was not an outdated sector, but one that could contribute very significantly to the economy, especially via small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

He cited as an example a "kerepek ubi" (tapioca chip) entrepreneur in Batu Pahat who now earns over RM1 million a year and more and more such success stories from SMEs had emerged under the government's "Farm to Factory" programme.

Abdullah also spoke of his own conviction of bringing about a trustworthy, honest and fair government.

"The point is that the government must be trustworthy and just. I'm a

Malay, a Muslim and I'm your Prime Minister. I have to be honest and trustworthy.

"It is important for the government to be just and fair to all. This is a universal value. When I make decisions, my decisions must be just and fair," he said.

The prime minister said Malaysia would be a progressive country if Malaysians, irrespective of race and religion, remained united and treated each other with goodwill and respect.

One thing that distinguished the country was the successful formula of power-sharing that took into account the interests of all that was reflected in the Cabinet ministers being drawn from leaders from virtually all races, he said.

And he had this parting shot for students: "I wish you do well in your studies. Look after yourselves, don't get into trouble...if you get into trouble, your parents will be very sad, I too will be very sad.

"I wish you success in whatever you do. Be a good example of what a good Malaysian is."

-- BERNAMA

AU ISA JK