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Dr M: Trips abroad have enlightened me

Ahmad A. Talib

DATUK Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, reflecting on all his visits abroad as part of his official duties, recalled how much these assignments had enlightened him and served as constant reminders in his approach to work.

The Prime Minister said visits to developing countries often inspired him to achieve more for the country while those to developed countries offered him new inputs such as those he acquired from Japan.

Asked at an early morning Press conference for a review of his trips abroad in the 22 years as Prime Minister, Dr Mahathir said: "I found that small countries tend to be more appreciative of such visits as seen in Africa and the Pacific.

"But visits to developed countries are different. They tend to pay attention if they wish to sell us something, such as their weapons.

"But I must say that trips to Japan yielded quite a few things, such as loans to help us develop our country on friendly terms.

"They also helped us to formulate the Look East policy."

Asked whether Malaysia would play the same role as Japan, Dr Mahathir said the Government had already put in place several mechanisms towards this, like the Malaysian Technical Co-operation, which offers help to poorer countries as a form of aid.

In dealing with other countries, especially less developed ones, the Prime Minister reminded everyone not to forget the country's beginnings.

"We were also poor once and we went through a lot of hardship to develop our country.

"Let us not forget that. As we can see, some countries which got out of poverty seemed to have forgotten this fact and have become arrogant.

"This is not going to serve us at all. We should learn from other people's experiences. I believe we should be friendly to everyone because when we have many friends, we have fewer enemies. And this should offer us some comfort and security.

"This is vital because when we speak at international forums or when vying for jobs, we can count on the support of our friends."

Timor Leste and Papua New Guinea are the last two countries visited by Dr Mahathir as Prime Minister.

Asked why he chose these two, Dr Mahathir said: "Well, the first countries I visited when I became the Prime Minister were small island nations like Tonga, Fiji and Samoa. This is consistent with my belief that we should be friendly to everyone.

"It also serves to remind me not to take our peace and prosperity for granted, especially after all the hardships we went through.

"We need to be always reminded of our poverty so that we can strive harder..."

Asked whether he has any specific advice to the Malay community, Dr Mahathir said: "I always believe that the Malays should not look for short cuts to wealth because there are none.

"They must be disciplined, diligent and develop a work culture in search of excellence.

"Selling one's assets is not necessarily the easiest and lasting way to acquire wealth."