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New version will revitalise handicraft sector, says Dr M

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - The Malaysian handicraft industry will be revitalised under a new version of the "one village one industry" concept, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The programme will now see small factories or production houses constructed in each village to churn out products, including non-handicraft items, the Prime Minister said.

Speaking at the launch of National Craft Day at the Craft Complex, Dr Mahathir said products would be identified for the factories to manufacture and the business would be given encouragement by the Government.

"This project is important as many villagers who do not work full-time have low income.

"As such, it is not possible for a farmer to have the same income as a factory worker.

"With the establishment of these factories in villages, farmers and fishermen can make full use of their time by working in the factories. This way, their income will increase."

Saying it was no longer feasible in this era of mass consumption for the handicraft industry to be one where "only one or two items are made a week to be sold in villages and nearby towns", the Prime Minister said industries which could not fulfil market demands would not succeed and might even eventually disappear.

"Many traditional industries are no longer in existence. If we want the handicraft industry to continue thriving, it must take into account market demands. Manufacturing handicraft in factories where the workload is spread around and machines used for certain tasks is one way to fulfil demand."

He said with the factories, training could also be provided for those interested in the field of factory management, and work practices like rostering duties or paying fixed wages could be cultivated to encourage faster production.

Dr Mahathir said this new method was conceived after previous efforts to develop the handicraft industry failed to achieve the objectives of revitalising the industry and increasing the income of villagers.

"We must make the handicraft industry one which is better managed, with factories practising disciplined work ethics, and which manufacture high quality products in accordance with demand. This is the only way to revitalise the industry and give workers and manufacturers a handsome income."

The Prime Minister said he did not want to see a developed Malaysia where only certain races were successful, while other races remained poor.

He reminded the Malays of colonial times when the British brought in workers from India and China to work when they were unwilling to do so, to the extent that at one time the Malays were the minority in (the then) Malaya.

"If not for the economic downturn in the 1930s which forced many foreigners to go back to their own countries, it is likely that the Malays would have been a weak minority at the time when the country was seeking Independence.

"If that had been the scenario, we would not have possessed the power we have now. We will be like the Malays in a certain Southeast Asian nation

who do not have the same rights as the rest of its citizens."

Saying that the country now, once again, had to depend on foreign workers, Dr Mahathir added that the Malays should not be disappointed if whatever political clout they had had eroded, and if they later became poor in a developed Malaysia.

A four-day handicraft exposition is being held at the Craft Complex in conjunction with National Craft Day, celebrated for the first time.

At the function, Dr Mahathir presented the Master Craftsman Award to Zainab @ Ngah Mamat, 61, of Kuala Terengganu.

Zainab, who has been active in songket weaving for 45 years, received, among others, a commendation certificate and RM30,000.