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`Protect Tengku's formula'

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MIRI, Fri. - Malaysians must protect and enhance the formula of racial tolerance created by the country's first Prime Minister, Tengku Abdul Rahman.

"The formula is working wonderfully well in our diverse cultural setting. Today we have a great responsibility to sustain and enhance it," Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad told a large crowd at the official opening of the RM220 million Miri Airport new terminal today.

The Prime Minister said Malaysia's ability to develop rapidly was made possible due to the high level of racial tolerance among the people.

"This is a fact of life in Malaysia, something that we must learn to be grateful."

As the country was peaceful and stable, it enabled the Government to plan and carry out development effectively.

"Today, even remote settlements in the country have access to computers and the Internet," he said, referring to the rural community Internet projects in Long Bedian and Bario, Sarawak.

He said when the Federation of Malaysia was proposed, the political leaders then were concerned whether it was possible to govern a country with such a diverse racial mix, religion and culture.

Citing Sarawak and Sabah as an example, Dr Mahathir said the States were populated by some 30 ethnic groups practising different religions and culture.

However, the different races in Malaysia were able to co-exist harmoniously.

"I am sure that the Tengku is satisfied with the success of the formula he initiated, a formula which we are duty-bound to continue for the benefit of future generations."

Dr Mahathir said the country's leadership might change, but Tengku's formula must be preserved.

"We should be grateful because we can co-exist. We are not asking for racial assimilation but for greater tolerance," he said, adding that the spirit of tolerance was also evident between employers and workers.

"The unions in Malaysia, for example, are very responsible. They don't just simply go on strike like in some other countries."

Dr Mahathir said when workers go on strike, other people would also be affected.

"For example, a few days ago, British Airways ground staff went on strike and innocent passengers suffered," he said, reminding the audience that when workers adopted a confrontational attitude, the economy could be hurt by their action as investors would stay away.

He said Malaysia was successful because the country was peaceful, stable, its Government strong and backed by the majority of the people and its wealth distributed fairly.

"The Government is pro-business because when companies make money, we will tax them and the funds are used to uplift the standard of living of the poor. This will not be possible without political stability."