

Malays face serious problem of leadership — Mahathir

M.S.M. — 08 DEC 1977

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. — Deputy Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir Mohamad said tonight that the Malays were facing a "very serious" problem of leadership.

The Malays were now at the point of nearly losing their sense of direction. To follow was wrong, and not to follow was also wrong. To be neutral was wrong, and not to be neutral was also wrong.

He said that he might have appeared to have painted an extreme picture of the situation, but extremism was relative. What was extreme before was a normal thing now, and what is extreme now would be a normal thing in the future.

But looking from the point of view of 1946 and 1957, Malays had a very serious problem of leadership now, he added.

But after the country had chosen the system of parliamentary democracy and the Ruler became a constitutional monarch, Malays started to face the problem of Malay leadership.

This did not mean that the democratic system was not good for Malays for it was better than that of the feudal system.

This was mainly because the advantage of the system could not ensure good results which would only be achieved if the system is carried out as planned and scheduled.

For it to run smoothly, those who practise it must fully understand how the system works and what its limitations are, he added.

He said democracy gave the opportunity to anyone to become a leader. As such, Malays were exposed to thousands of leaders of all styles.

The Malay leaders and

Nationalist

Dr. Mahathir said that where before Malays were nationalists, there were voices now saying that a Malay nationalist is a chauvinist and un-Muslim. As a Muslim, they should not be nationalistic.

According to them the most important thing was Muslim unity. But unfortunately, their criticisms were not able to unite the Malays as Muslims. Rather, they had divided and weakened them.

There were people who had gone to various Muslim countries to smear the Malays and the Government under Malay leadership as "merely a Nationalist Government" and "not so Islamic."

They tried to sour up the good relations between Malaysia and the Middle East countries.

Malay nationalism and unity were being criticised not only by this

they continued to be confused and did not know their direction.

It was not easy for ordinary Malays to choose which group of leaders is right, he added.

But, whoever the leader the people chose, he would be a target for criticism when he takes office, because no one satisfies them, Dr. Mahathir said.

He added that it was natural that leaders who were not elected and were seeking for position did not see any good in the work done by the elected leader, although he was popular and received wide support before he was elected. The criticisms either openly or privately would mount from time to time. Anonymous letters, full of accusations and threats, would be sent everywhere.

Little by little, the accusations, however unreasonable and strange they are, were accepted. People then started to doubt a leader whom they highly respected before he took office. His supporters began to drift away because they were afraid to be involved in his fall.

Eventually the leader fell, and soon after his fall, there were sad sighs all round because the people began to realise that he had fought and given all his efforts and time for them. Therefore, he should not be victimised.

The longer the leader was away from the seat of power, the better was his image. His mistakes were forgotten, or at least not mentioned. Those who previously criticised him, now sang his praises.

But the sad process would start all over again if he was re-elected to power.

This process occurred since the beginning of civilisation. It had happened to Julius Caesar and it had also happened to President Nixon. But

He was speaking at the opening of a symposium on Malay Leadership organised jointly by the Department of Malay Studies and the Malay Language Society of the University of Malaya.

Earlier, Dr. Mahathir said that the symposium was held at the right time and place for possibly never in the history of the Malays has their leadership been in a chaotic state or their credibility been questioned as at the present time.

Allegations of corruption and of consorting with and being made tools by the communists and socialists, using their influence for self-interest were thrown about until it appeared that no Malay leader could be trusted.

Dr. Mahathir said that in this kind of a situation, it was no longer easy, as in the feudal days, to understand the role of Malay leaders in their society. In the feudal days, there was no problem of Malay leadership. The Ruler was automatically a leader and he had powers which could not be questioned or opposed.

leadership had not had the same objective or approach.

The Malays were asked to go to the left, right, forward, backward, up and down. They were asked to work hard to achieve prosperity. They were asked not to work too hard because they should not pursue material gains. They were told to learn.

At the same time they were also asked to put aside what was described as secular knowledge. One group asked them to adopt an ideology while another group told them not to adopt any ideology.

In fact, they were faced with a thousand and one contradictions from Malay leaders and leadership.

It was no wonder that the Malays were in a confused state of mind, not knowing which direction to follow.

If from 1946 to 1957 the Malays were strongly united to achieve the objectives determined by their leaders, the Malays were now divided into one thousand and one groups which were constantly quarrelling among themselves, he said.

group. There were others who were willing to travel abroad to smear their own country and the Malay leadership.

They were said to be patriots and they were willing to mislead the Malays and their leadership if they were praised, particularly by the Europeans. This further divided the Malays.

In the meantime, leaders of various styles were found in the country, young and old, all claiming that they were the only people who knew the direction to peace and prosperity for the Malays.

On the one hand, there were those who said that because they were old and had been long in the political struggle they were the ones who should provide the leadership. On the other hand, there were those who possess degrees who claim that they were the ones qualified to lead.

The result was rivalry and mudslinging. Malays who heard and saw the activities of their leaders — including himself — were sometimes sad and sometimes happy with their antics, but

when the process occurred in the Malay society which has just emerged from the feudal system, the effect was more serious.

This was because the Malay society was not yet strong and stable and the country in which the Malays live is not inhabited by Malays alone. Their position is weak in nearly all fields. Therefore, the effect is worse when the Malay society is hit by the process.

Dr. Mahathir said that the holding of the symposium showed that Malay intellectuals were giving serious attention to the problem of Malay leadership.

Generally, the Malay intellectuals belong to the young generation, and whether the older generation liked it or not, they will inherit the leadership.

The old generation may campaign against those with degrees, but they cannot stop the process of change.

Sooner or later, the intellectuals will take over the leadership, he added. Dr. Mahathir said that he prayed that the symposium would not be a place to let off hot air so as to further confuse the Malays.