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KUALA LUMPUR, MAY 12 (BERNAMA) -- MALAYSIA WILL HAVE GAINED ITS INDEPENDENCE IN VAIN IF IT HAS TO DEPEND ON OTHER COUNTRIES TO DEFEND IT AGAINST ITS ENEMIES, PRIME MINISTER DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR MOHAMAD SAID TONIGHT.

THE DEFENCE OF THE COUNTRY WAS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE PEOPLE, HE SAID AT A BREAKING OF FAST CEREMONY AT THE MINDEF MOSQUE HERE. +OTHERWISE, WE WILL FIND OUR COUNTRY DOMINATED BY OTHER COUNTRIES LIKE WHAT HAPPENED BEFORE WE ACHIEVED INDEPENDENCE,+ HE ADDED.

DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR, WHO WAS FORMERLY ALSO DEFENCE MINISTER, SAID THE MILITARY PERSONNEL HAD SHOULDERED A HEAVY RESPONSIBILITY IN DEFENDING THE THE COUNTRY FROM ITS ENEMIES, ESPECIALLY THE COMMUNIST TERRORISTS.

THE SACRIFICES OF THE NON-MUSLIM MILITARY PERSONNEL SHOULD ALSO NOT BE FORGOTTEN ALTHOUGH MOST OF THE MILITARY PERSONNEL WERE MUSLIMS. -- MORE  
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THEIR SACRIFICES MUST BE RESPECTED SO THAT THEY WOULD GET THE TRUE PICTURE THAT ISLAM WAS A FAIR RELIGION AND IT WOULD ALSO DISPEL ANY DOUBTS THEY MIGHT HAVE ABOUT COOPERATING WITH THE MUSLIMS, HE SAID.

DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR ALSO URGED THE MILITARY PERSONNEL TO GIVE TO THE NEW DEFENCE MINISTER, DATUK ABDULLAH AHMAD BADAWI, THE SAME COOPERATION THAT THEY HAD GIVEN HIM.

HE SAID HE WAS NOT COMPLETELY CUT OFF FROM THE ISSUE OF NATIONAL DEFENCE BECAUSE AS HOME MINISTER MATTERS OF NATIONAL SECURITY WERE ALSO VERY IMPORTANT.

EARLIER DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR WHO WAS ACCOMPANIED BY HIS WIFE, DATUK SERI DATIN PADUKA DR SITI HASMAH ALI, PERFORMED MAGHRIB PRAYERS WITH ABOUT 300 PEOPLE AT THE MOSQUE.

AMONG THOSE PRESENT WERE DATUK ABDULLAH, DEPUTY DEFENCE MINISTER DATUK ABANG ABU BAKAR MUSTAPHA, DEFENCE MINISTRY SECRETARY-GENERAL TAN SRI MOHAMED YUSUF ABDUL RAHMAN AND CHIEF OF DEFENCE FORCES JENERAL TAN SRI GHAZALI CHE MAT. -- BERNAMA  
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