

Don't run down the country, says Mahathir

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KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad tonight urged Malaysians not to denigrate the country by highlighting its woes and shortcomings as it could turn foreign tourists and investors away.

They should count their blessings and learn how to effectively handle these challenges for their common good.

"In the history of a nation, many things happen. They are all passing events. The passage would be made easier if we learn how to handle these things," he said when addressing the National Press Club at a dinner tonight.

The Prime Minister, in describing Malaysians as "quite unique", felt that many failed to see the positive aspects of Malaysian life. Instead, they dwelt on the negative aspects and "can see nothing right in the country".

Dr Mahathir said a

group of influential Malaysians were also out to frustrate the Government's efforts to improve the country by introducing changes from time to time.

Their strategy was to question the wisdom of Government policies and put down changes meant to improve the economy and the nation's image.

For instance, they found fault with the Government's industrialisation effort and move to wean it from its agricultural past.

"None of us will gain by running down our country and making our dire predictions come true."

Dr Mahathir pointed out that although some people in Europe and America also experienced, among other things, poverty, crime, racial and colour discrimination, these were not highlighted by the Press.

He advised Malaysians not to take their distaste for individuals or groups "out on the country" as this would

By BALAN MOSES

not benefit the country in any way.

The Prime Minister said the Government had been trying to introduce changes to the country as it felt that the people wanted such changes.

"This is why we took up an independent stand (on issues) and are prepared to fight for our rights anywhere. This is also why we are trying to industrialise our nation and not let it remain a supplier of raw materials for the developed nations."

Later, answering questions from the floor, Dr Mahathir said the nation needed the co-operation of all its people to face the challenges ahead.

"It is impossible to think that one person can solve the nation's problems. They can only be solved with co-operation from all."

Replying to a question on whether Malaysia could solve the econ-

omic and political problems besetting it, he was confident that such matters could be resolved.

Asked if he was confident of a Barisan Nasional victory in the coming general election, he said the coalition would win convincingly without having to resort to unethical practises.

On licenses for newspapers, he said this was a tradition in Malaysia "and there is no reason for change". He rejected the notion that the Malaysian Press was muzzled "as we only have to count the mosquito newspapers and their contents".

To a question on Press freedom, he said: "I feel Press freedom should take second place behind national interests. There is nothing more important than national interests, even personal freedom."

The Prime Minister urged journalists to use their discretion and remember that Malaysia

was a developing country which had its special needs.

Asked if the Government was considering a relaxation of the ban on public rallies, he said: "We are still not sure if untoward incidents will occur if public rallies are allowed. We should be careful in this matter as we don't want things happening in other countries to be repeated here."

He, nevertheless, said the Government would consider the matter carefully.

Clarifying his earlier statement that Datuk Musa Hitam's resignation from his Government and party posts was not so big a matter that it could not be solved, he said that as far as he knew Datuk Musa had never said that his resignation was a big issue.

"When asked I said that there were bigger things in terms of unity in Umno. For example, the contest for the deputy Umno presidency which was an issue with greater connections to party unity."