

MAHATHIR  
FROM WAN A. HULAIMI,

87  
LONDON, JAN. 15 (BERNAMA) -- THE PRIME MINISTER DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR MOHAMAD TOLD MALAYSIAN STUDENTS HERE THAT STRENGTH OF CHARACTER WAS AN ESSENTIAL QUALITY FOR HOLDERS OF PUBLIC OFFICE, AND THAT IN FUTURE, CANDIDATES FOR THESE POSTS WOULD HAVE TO UNDERGO A COURSE TO DETERMINE THEIR SUITABILITY.

THE PRIME MINISTER SAID AT A MEETING ORGANISED BY THE KELAB UMNO UNITED KINGDOM AT THE MALAYSIAN HIGH COMMISSION THAT EDUCATION ALONE COULD NOT GUARANTEE SUCCESS FOR THE NATION.

WHAT WAS NEEDED, HE SAID, WAS THE STRENGTH OF CHARACTER WHICH WAS ESSENTIAL FOR MALAYSIA TO GAIN RESPECT AMONG NATIONS.

HE SAID THAT THERE WERE PEOPLE WHO, WHEN PUT IN POSITIONS OF TRUST, ABUSED THEIR POSITIONS AND STOLE FROM THE VERY INSTITUTIONS THEY WERE IN CHARGE OF.

+YOU MIGHT THINK ONLY ONE OR TWO PERSONS ARE INVOLVED. YOU MIGHT THINK OF THE BUMIPUTRA MERCHANT FINANCE. BUT THESE ARE NOT THE ONLY INSTANCES.

+WE HAVE REACHED A LEVEL WHERE WE CAN NO LONGER TRUST IN PEOPLE, + HE SAID.

THAT WAS WHY, HE SAID, THE GOVERNMENT HAD DEVISED A SYSTEM TO AVOID SUCH ABUSE OF POWER ALTHOUGH THAT GAVE RISE TO COMPLAINTS THAT THERE WERE TOO MUCH RED-TAPE, OR GENERAL ORDERS.

HE SAID THAT THESE EXIST FOR A REASON AND THAT MANY THINGS COULD HAPPEN IF POWER WAS VESTED IN ONE PERSON ALONE. THAT WAS WHY THERE HAD TO BE A SYSTEM OF CHECKS AND BALANCES, EVEN THOUGH IT MIGHT SOMETIMES MEAN THAT MORE TIME WAS TAKEN TO IMPLEMENT SOMETHING.

+BECAUSE OF THE IMPROPER BEHAVIOUR OF ONE OR TWO PEOPLE, THE REST HAVE TO BEAR THE BURDEN. WE HAVE TO TAKE ALL SORTS OF MEASURES TO AVOID MALPRACTICES, + HE SAID.

THROUGHOUT HIS MEETING WITH THE STUDENTS, WHICH LASTED NEARLY THREE HOURS, THE PRIME MINISTER REPEATEDLY EMPHASISED THE IMPORTANCE OF CHARACTER BUILDING AS AN ESSENTIAL QUALITY FAR MORE IMPORTANT THAN JUST PURSUING A HIGHER DEGREE FOR ITS OWN SAKE.

+A GOOD CHARACTER IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN A DOCTORATE IN PHILOSOPHY, + HE SAID.

HE SAID HE HAD DWELT AT LENGTH ON THE VALUE SYSTEM OF A NATION IN HIS BOOK +THE MALAY DILEMMA+. HE SAID: +THIS IS NOT THE VALUE SYSTEM THAT IS SPOKEN ABOUT, BUT THAT WHICH IS PUT INTO PRACTICE. +

REPLYING TO A QUESTION ON THE RECENT AMENDMENTS TO THE OFFICIAL SECRETS ACT (OSA), HE SAID THAT THERE WERE SECRETS IN BANKING, IN BUSINESS, AND EVEN BETWEEN HUSBAND AND WIFE. SO TOO THE GOVERNMENT MUST HAVE ITS OWN SECRETS ON MATTERS RELATING TO NATIONAL SECURITY OR THOSE WHICH CONCERNED GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS.

HE AGAIN SPOKE ABOUT THE STRENGTH OF MORAL CHARACTER, AND SAID THAT WE LIVE IN A SOCIETY WHICH NO LONGER HAD ANY HONOUR (+ MARUAH+).

+IF THERE IS A CONTRACT WORTH M\$100 MILLION THERE ARE MANY WHO WANT THAT CONTRACT. COMPANIES WHO WISH TO OBTAIN THE TENDER WOULD BE WILLING TO BRIBE AN OFFICE BOY (TO OBTAIN THE SECRET). THERE ARE PEOPLE WHO ARE WILLING TO BUY SECRETS. +

REFERRING TO JOURNALISTS - WHO OPPOSED THE AMENDEMENTS- DATUK SERI DR. MAHATHIR SAID THAT NOWADAYS THEY SEEK FAME, AND ARE WILLING TO PAY FOR SECRETS. THEY ARE WILLING TO PAY FINES OF M\$10,000 OR M\$100,000. THERE IS ONLY ONE WAY OF DETERRING THEM, AND THAT IS BY IMPOSING A MANDATORY PRISON SENTENCE. +

HE SAID THAT THESE JOURNALISTS MADE UP STORIES TO THE EFFECT THERE WAS NO LONGER DEMOCRACY IN MALAYSIA, AND THAT THE SITUATION WAS LIKE THAT WHICH PREVAILED DURING THE JAPANESE OCCUPATION.

+HOW MANY PEOPLE HAVE WE BEHEADED ?+ HE ASKED. REPLYING TO ANOTHER QUESTION IF THE NEW OFFICIAL SECRETS ACT HAD AFFECTED THE INDEPENDENCE OF THE JUDICIARY, DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR SAID THAT JUDGES HAD NEVER BEEN FREE TO CHOOSE WHAT SENTENCE TO IMPOSE ON AN OFFENDER BECAUSE IT (THE SENTENCE) HAD ALREADY BEEN LAID DOWN IN THE LAW.

IN OLDEN DAYS, A JUDGE COULD SENTENCE A PERSON TO CLEAN HIS (THE JUDGE+S) HOUSE FOR THREE DAYS, BUT IN MODERN TIMES JUDGES NO LONGER HAD THE FREEDOM TO CHOOSE THE TYPE OF SENTENCE. A JUDGE IS NOT FREE TO HANG A PERSON WHO STOLE A CHICKEN, HE SAID.

DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR SAID THAT THIS DID NOT TOUCH ON THE QUESTION OF JUSTICE, AS THE JUDGES STILL HAD THE FREEDOM TO DECIDE ON THE BASIS OF EVIDENCE WHETHER OR NOT A PERSON WAS GUILTY.

+THE INTENTION OF A GOVERNMENT IN PROVIDING A LAW IS NOT TO OPPRESS; BUT TO PROVIDE GOOD GOVERNMENT,+ HE SAID.

HE SAID HE WAS AGAINST A FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT BECAUSE IT WAS IMPRACTICAL.

REPLYING TO ANOTHER QUESTION ABOUT COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY IN CABINET, DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR REPLIED LIGHT-HEARTEDLY THAT THE OPPOSITION LEADER LIM KIT SIANG HAD APPROACHED DATIN PADUKA RAFIDAH AZIZ AND TOLD HER: +YOU DARE NOT TALK IN THE CABINET.+, AT WHICH DATIN PADUKA GAVE A BIG LAUGH.

+RAFIDAH KNEW THAT SHE TALKED THE MOST IN CABINET MEETINGS,+ HE SAID. +IN ONE INSTANCE, THE CABINET MEETING WAS VERY BRIEF BECAUSE DATIN PADUKA RAFIDAH AND DATUK SAMY VELLU WERE NOT PRESENT.+

HE SAID HE PERSONALLY PREFERRED A BRIEF CABINET MEETING RATHER THAN THOSE WHICH DRAGGED ON TILL LATE INTO THE NIGHT.

+MY CABINET MEETINGS DO NOT GO BEYOND ONE O'CLOCK, SOMETIMES TO TWO O'CLOCK (IN THE AFTERNOON). THERE ARE STORIES THAT I AM THE ONLY ONE WHO SPEAKS AT THOSE MEETINGS. IT IS DIFFICULT FOR ME TO TALK FROM NINE TO TWO. OTHERS TALK TOO. THERE ARE TIMES WHEN MY VIEWS ARE NOT ACCEPTED.+

ON THE UMNO IN SABAH, HE SAID THAT MEMBERSHIP WAS OPEN TO ALL BUMIPUTRAS, AND NOT JUST TO USNO MEMBERS.

HE SAID THAT UMNO FELT THAT IT HAD A RESPONSIBILITY TOWARDS THE MUSLIMS THERE ESPECIALLY AFTER THERE HAD BEEN REPRESENTATIONS TO HIM BY MUSLIMS WHO WERE NOT MEMBERS OF USNO OR PBS WHO WERE CONCERNED ABOUT THEIR LACK OF LEADERSHIP.

UMNO HAD NO INTENTION OF GOING TO SABAH, BUT IF PAS WENT THERE, THE MUSLIMS MIGHT BE INFLUENCED, DR MAHATHIR SAID, AND THEY MIGHT BRING TEACHINGS WHICH ARE DIVISIVE AND IF ALLOWED TO SPREAD, MIGHT WORSEN THE PLIGHT OF THE MUSLIMS THERE.

PRIME MINISTER DATUK SRI DR MAHATHIR MOHAMAD TOOK HIS MIND FROM THE CARES OF OFFICE DURING THE FIRST TWO DAYS OF HIS HOLIDAYS HERE LEARNING THE SKILLS OF WOOD-TURNING IN A SMALL CLASS IN BUXTON IN NORTHERN ENGLAND.

DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR MENTIONED TO A GATHERING OF STUDENTS AT THE HIGH COMMISSION YESTERDAY HE CHOSE TO LEARN THE SKILLS OF WOOD-TURNING BECAUSE HE WAS IMPRESSED BY THE VALUE ADDED TO THE WOOD THAT IS AVAILABLE IN PLENTY IN OUR COUNTRY BY THE APPLICATION OF CRAFTSMANSHIP BY THE WORKERS HERE.

HE ALSO SAID THAT HE WAS ALSO MOVED TO LEARN WOOD-TURNING BY HIS ANGER AT THE REFUSAL OF PEOPLE HE SPOKE, TO PICK UP THOSE SKILLS INSTEAD OF OPTING FOR EASIER WAYS OF EARNING MONEY BY IMPORTING SECOND-HAND CARS.

HE SAID HE ONCE LECTURED ON THE NEED TO LEARN SUCH SKILLS FOR ABOUT AN HOUR TO A GROUP OF PEOPLE WHO LATER ADDED TO HIS EXASPERATION BY ASKING ABOUT SECOND-HAND CAR IMPORT LICENCES.

HE WAS IMPRESSED, HE SAID, BY THE HIGH VALUE ADDED TO CRAFTED WOOD SOLD IN THE SHOPS IN BRITAIN. + WE HAVE THESE WOOD IN PLENTY, YET WE DO NOT KNOW HOW TO USE THEM. + HE SAID.

SPEAKING FROM EXPERIENCE, DATUK SERI DR MAHATHIR TOLD THE STUDENTS IT WAS NOT DIFFICULT TO MANUFACTURE SUCH PRODUCTS, BUT WHEN HE PERSUADED PEOPLE TO BUY THE MACHINES TO MAKE THEM, THEY SEEMED UNINTERESTED.

IT WAS LEARNT LATER THAT THE PRIME MINISTER'S INTEREST IN WOOD WAS NOT BROUGHT ABOUT MERELY BY HIS FRUSTRATION AT BEING UNABLE TO PERSUADE OTHERS OF THE VIRTUES OF WORKING WITH WOOD. HE HAD BEEN A KEEN HOBBYIST FOR SOMETIME.

SOURCES IN THE HIGH COMMISSION TOLD BERNAMA THAT THE PRIME MINISTER HAD BEEN SUBSCRIBING TO WOODWORKING MAGAZINES FOR SOMETIME, AND PRIOR TO HIS ARRIVAL HERE, HAD ASKED THEM TO SELECT A SUITABLE COURSE FOR HIM TO LEARN WOOD-TURNING DURING HIS HOLIDAYS.

IN THE PRIME MINISTER'S LUGGAGE TO BUXTON WERE PIECES OF RUBBER WOOD BROUGHT SPECIALLY FROM MALAYSIA WHICH HE CARVED INTO THREE ITEMS WHICH HE OFFERED - WITH SOME PRIDE - TO SHOW THE STUDENTS YESTERDAY.

NO ONE, UNFORTUNATELY, TOOK UP THE OFFER. IF THEY DID, THEY WOULD HAVE BEEN ABLE TO JUDGE DR MAHATHIR'S SKILLS IN MAKING THE THREE ITEMS. THEY WERE: A BOWL, A PEPPER MILL, AND AN ORNAMENTAL WOODEN EGG. -- BERNAMA