

From petty trader to Prime Minister

ALOR STAR, Thurs. Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad last night took Pekan Rabu traders through time to his days as a petty trader at the market.

Relating his experiences which began before World War II, he said he first went to the market when he was a Standard Two pupil at the Sekolah Melayu Seberang Perak.

"A friend and I took a sampan ride from Lorong Gelang to Pekan Rabu and we walked back because we did not have the money to pay for the sampan fare.

"Pekan Rabu, then at Jalan Pekan China, later shifted to its present location. It then consisted only of three stalls with zinc roofs," he told Pekan Rabu traders at a dinner at the Dewan Syed Omar.

Dr Mahathir, who took his first step into the business world by opening a canteen at a Government department, said he moved into Pekan Rabu after his canteen was pulled down by Japanese soldiers.

"I then moved to Pekan Rabu and opened a coffee shop selling ginger drink because it was hard to get coffee during the Japanese occupation," he said.

He later sold the shop and sold bananas at Pekankabu with a friend by the name of Nana Noor who had come to Alor Star from Penang.

The Prime Minister's quip that he was glad to be the "first graduate from Pekan Rabu to be Prime Minister" had the 1,000-odd traders and undergraduates from Universiti Sains Malaysia in stitches.

"There were not many problems then but today I see the problems are increasing," he said.

Dr Mahathir was unhappy that traders were uncooperative in efforts to improve Pekan Rabu.

"The Government has contributed to efforts to improve Pekan Rabu but the traders do not want to abide by the rules.

"We told them not to make extensions to their shops but they ignored our advice and now Pekan Rabu is congested," he added.

Dr Mahathir said the Government wanted to turn Pekan Rabu into a departmental store along the lines of the Central Market in Kuala Lumpur.

"The Government is trying to upgrade Pekan Rabu but if the traders do not accept this, its aspirations will not be realised.

"Frankly, if the traders do not want to follow the right path, there will no be funds for improvement. If the traders want the funds, they have to act properly."

In his speech, Menteri Besar Tan Sri Haji Osman Aroff said Pekan Rabu needed nearly \$2 million to be

upgraded into a modern shopping complex.

He said a study conducted by a special committee set up by the State Government last August had made several proposals to improve the complex.

"These proposals include renovations and beautification of the complex and its surroundings," he said.

Tan Sri Han Osman said the State Government had already applied for the allocation from the Federal Government.

One of the proposals is to relocate several petty traders from the back lane of Pekan Rabu to another area near the Bank Rakvat building.

"Many areas needed to be improved, including display of sale items which are now unsystematic and looked too cramped.

"Traders should learn to display their sales more interestingly to attract customers," he added.

On the study by USM undergraduates on business at Pekan Rabu, the Menteri Besar said the State Government would consider all suggestions and proposals that it received.

The students had stayed with the traders for a week to learn the finer points of business.

Dr Mahathir, who was the guest of honour, later presented prizes to the five best stall winners