

Malaysia to be a mature nation by 2020, says Dr M

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KLJALA LLJMPUR. Fri. — Malaysia will be a mature nation by the year 2020 as Malaysians would then have had 60 years of shared experiences through common values and perception and a common language.

This was Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's message in a keynote address at a dinner organised by the Harvard Club of Malaysia at the Shangri-La Hotel here tonight.

Speaking on the topic *A United Malaysian Nation By the Year 2020*, Dr Mahathir said that by the year 2020, Malaysians would have shared nationhood for six decades.

"After six decades, if we manage our nation-building process conscientiously and well and suffer no major setbacks, we would have traversed twice the distance we have covered so far.

"We would have had 60 years of shared historical experience, of fashioning shared destinies, of cultivating common values and perceptions, of bonding the people with a common language, and of evolving without duress a uniquely Malaysian culture, identity and ethos which is organic to the Malaysian environment.

"If we are still not a mature nation by then, we would at least be well on the path to healthy nationhood."

Dr Mahathir said all this would come to pass if the nation-building process was managed well.

"This will entail honouring the respective obligations and responsibilities under the Constitution whether it relates to politics, citizenship, socio-economic opportunities, language, religion or the respective powers of the centre and the state."

The Prime Minister said managing nation-building

well also entailed redressing socio-economic imbalances among the various ethnic groups and regions.

He said the country also had to grow during this process of nation-building for without growth, it would not have the resources to redress anything.

"If we do not redress we will self-destruct, which will reduce to naught all our growth. It is for this reason that Malaysia needs a policy of sustainable growth with equity in order to build a sound and resilient base for national unity.

"We have already come a significant way towards redressing imbalances in the last 30 years. Hopefully by the year 2020, we would have overcome the problem altogether," he said.

"If we are indeed able to achieve this without unduly sacrificing growth and without undermining the legitimate rights of everyone, I would say we would have overcome the greatest single obstacle to national unity."

Dr Mahathir said the private sector also had an important role to play.

He said this was especially so as the Government progressively privatised its operations and de-regulated.

It would also be in its own interests for the private sector to contribute more substantively as national unity and ethnic harmony were the pre-requisites of political stability so vital for good business.

He called on Bumiputeras to participate more actively in the more dynamic and lucrative sectors of the economy.

He said with more industrialisation and urbanisation, the urgency and importance of modifying their traditional psycho-cultural values and attitudes would grow.

"Only when we change

will our progress and advancement be sustainable and self-reliant. We can change and adapt without discarding all that is good that we inherited; these we must keep and these we must cherish."

As peace and stability were crucial for progress, he said, Malaysians must reject the forces of extremism and intolerance, of disorder and disruption.

On ethnic and religious conflicts, he said Malaysia came close to catastrophe and "if we can help it, we do not want to walk through these dark passages again".

Issues considered sensitive and inflammatory were removed from public debate and controversy.

"Even if this is perceived as infringements on human rights particularly by some foreign quarters, we apologise to nobody.

"We can be sure that they will not be around to carry the burden when the nation is crippled by violence, or to pick up the pieces when it implodes.

"The limits that we impose on our rights and liberties we do by due process of law and democracy, and we have a healthy and stable working democracy as well as a deep respect for the rule of law."

Tracing the history of Malaysia's nationhood from the pre-Independence days, he said the fundamental prerequisites for attaining nationhood differed from one country to another.

He said Malaysia was a legally-constituted nation with no common inherited ethnicity or culture or language. Even the geographical boundaries did not evolve but were delineated by common consent through negotiations.

In the peninsula, the common factor was the recognition of the federation of the Malay States as the basis for the nation. But, by the time

of Independence, these States had already been changed through linkages instituted by the British.

The population had changed so that a common ethnic origin could not be the basis for national unity. The presence of citizens of differing ethnic and cultural origins required the formulation of a new basis for national unity.

He said it was fortunate that the founding fathers were able to reach broad agreement on the basis for national unity.

"This socio-political contract bound together the citizens of Malaya and with minor modifications has been accepted by the peoples of Sabah and Sarawak when Malaysia was formed."

Describing the acceptance of this socio-political contract as "real and sincere", he said Malaysia had since then gone through many trials and tribulations but the nation came through intact.

"Indeed, we learnt how to curb our feelings and to manage ourselves better."

He said the consensus was not reached without challenge and neither did it survive without strain.

"There were the communists, and there were and still are the extremists. For one brief period, we even had to suspend Parliament to save the country.

"In other words, we had to be undemocratic in order to save democracy.

"And because we acted promptly and decisively, we were able to return to the original consensus which has since proven to be an admirably viable and comprehensive proposition.

"I am confident that this basic social contract by which we have lived so successfully in the last 30-plus years will continue to serve us well in the next three decades."