

Dr Mahathir keeps busy schedule on visit to Baling

BALING, Thurs. — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad maintained an extremely tight schedule on his one-day visit to the town once regarded as one of the poorest in the country.

Dr Mahathir gave four speeches during the short tour which started with the opening of the new township here. Accompanied by his wife, Datin Seri Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, the Prime Minister moved with the crowd shaking hands with well-wishers and the ordinary rakyat.

His speeches centred around unity of the various communities, advice to the rakyat on the need to enhance their knowledge and skills, increase their level of tolerance and work hard to improve their livelihood.

The speeches were at the opening of the new township, a meeting with teachers and heads of department, the launching of an integrated coffee growing project and a gathering of Barisan Nasional leaders and supporters in Alor Star.

At the gathering with teachers and heads of department from the Baling and Sik districts at the Sekolah Menengah Siong, about 15km from here, Dr Mahathir stressed the need to turn the development of skills and quality of work into part of the Malaysian culture.

He said the people would become more industrious and knowledgeable if they continuously worked at improving the skills and knowledge which they had acquired.

"What is important is for us to keep trying, repeating our work at something until we become an expert.

"If we keep doing this and pass on the practice of always trying to improve ourselves to the next generation, then it (the practice) will become automatic among the people and become part of our culture."

Also present were Menteri Besar Tan Sri Osman Aroff, MP for Baling Raja Datuk Ariffin Raja Sulaiman and several State executive councillors.

Dr Mahathir, who was accompanied by his wife, Datin Seri Siti Hasmah

Mohd Ali, was here on a day-long visit.

The Prime Minister cited the unique carving expertise inherited by the people of Bali and the exquisite designs of carpets by Iranians as the result of continuously trying to improve their skills and knowledge by the people of the two places over a few generations.

He also advised Malaysians to emulate the Japanese who never ceased to strive for excellence in everything they did.

Dr Mahathir said today there were Malay corporate leaders like Tan Sri Rashdan Baba and Datuk Tajuddin Ramli who were successfully running Syarikat Telekom Malaysia and Malaysia Airlines.

"Even people like (Tan Sri) Lim Goh Tong never went to school but shared his ideas with his sons and is a very successful businessman in many fields."

Dr Mahathir also said the objective of the country's development had never remained static in order to progress continuously.

"Although we have attained a certain level of success, we can still do more.

"A developed culture must always change its targets so that the people can achieve better progress."

Dr Mahathir also said teachers could play a very important role in an effort to encourage the development of skills and knowledge in the country.

"Parents' involvement is important too, but teachers have a direct role to help realise this new cultural trait among the people.

"Dedicated teachers do not serve for monetary gain but serve to help develop the people and the country."

After his speech, Dr Mahathir immediately proceeded to Kampong Lalang, a 30-minute trip by road from here, to launch the coffee project which was initiated by Gadek Malaysia Berhad.

At this function, held under the shade of freshly-tapped swaying rubber trees, Dr Mahathir said there were plenty of jobs in the country following the Government's policy of encouraging labour-intensive factories. Over the years,

the policy has managed to reduce unemployment in the country and this has helped to make the people enjoy better living standards.

This success has also helped the private sector gain new markets in and outside the country. Gadek Malaysia Berhad, he said, was one of the many private sector companies which had now ploughed back into the community what it had gained from sound government policies.

The Prime Minister said the success of the private sector was also a success for the people because the Government would be able to tax the wealthy and help develop the nation.

Gadek chairman Datuk Yahaya Ahmad said the company was happy to be involved in a programme which would help improve the people's income level. He said the project was made possible with the support and encouragement from all levels of government.

The Prime Minister's programme was well received throughout. Except for the launching of the coffee project, the rest were held under the sweltering heat.

But this did not appear to deter the crowd, many of whom had gathered at the various venues quite early to catch a glimpse of their leader.

Children competed with their parents to shake hands with Dr Mahathir and his wife. The Prime Minister's popularity was quite obvious. For instance, a large crowd waited at a school padang in Kampung Lalang to see the Prime Minister take off on a helicopter to go back to Alor Star for a night function.

Flags and banners put up by the various component parties of the Barisan Nasional were also displayed at various locations, lending added excitement to the small town.

Pas also put up their flags and bunting at all venues where the Prime Minister held his functions. Dr Mahathir said he welcomed the Pas flags, which he regarded as a sign of welcome by the party.