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Mahathir-leadership

LEADERS MUST BE ABLE TO MAKE ADJUSTMENTS AND SACRIFICES, SAYS MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 17 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said tonight future leaders must have vision and be willing to make the necessary adjustments and sacrifices based on a critical examination of past leaders if they want to become good leaders.

Leaders, the prime minister said, must of course lead and if they merely followed in the footsteps of past leaders, then they could not truly be called leaders.

Dr Mahathir said that if they found the methods of the past wanting in any way, they should be willing to modify or even discard them and initiate their own strategies or policies.

"To lead, it is obvious that a leader must know where he is leading to. A leader who does not know his destination cannot really lead," he said at the Harvard Club dinner, here.

The Prime Minister said that to become good and effective leaders, they should study the past leaders and the kind of leadership responsible for the decline of some of them.

Among the legendary leaders he named were Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Prophet Muhammad and the early Caliphs, Napoleon Bonaparte, Genghis Khan, Mehmet II, Sulaiman the Magnificent and Akhbar the Great.

Singling out Genghis Khan, Dr Mahathir said: "This chief of a small wild nomadic tribe of cattle and sheep herdsman fought, persuaded and welded the small tribes of wandering Mongols into a great fighting force and into a nation."

Dr Mahathir said a leader who was popular because he or she was mild and accommodating was not likely to achieve much.

He said there was clearly a need for a leader to show humility and assertiveness.

"This is not going to be easy...But then if it is, everyone can become a leader," he said.

The prime minister said a leader might be a pious practitioner of all that is good but if he is not assertive and ready to defend his actions, he could still fail.

He said a leader must also have vision, the ability to see beyond what others see, to determine new objectives and targets, to access the capabilities of his followers, to encourage and arouse them and to guide them to greater achievements.

"The ideals of leadership are many. No leader can have all of them. But it suffices if some of these qualities are to be found or are absorbed by a leader," he said.

Dr Mahathir said a leader who abused his power was not thinking of his future good but the immediate gains from corruption.

"Of course those who allow themselves to be corrupted even before they become leaders will never make it at all," he said.

He said one could expect to succeed as a leader if one did all the things that society condemned as bad.

"But the fact is that many who wish to be leaders or who are leaders quite knowingly do those things which they know society would accept," Dr Mahathir said.

He said as ordinary people, one would condemn arrogance or dishonesty or selfishness but the moment one became a leader, he or she would display those very traits.

The prime minister said whether a nation succeeded or failed or remained mediocre depended very much on the quality of leadership the nation generated.

He said the ideals of leadership were determined through the composition of a society, its religious beliefs and its culture.

Dr Mahathir said the ideals in Malaysia were rendered more complex because of its multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural society.

He said Malaysians were a tolerant lot and as such they would forgive mistakes made by leaders from other ethnic groups but "they may not be so forgiving if leaders from their own ethnic or cultural group make the same mistakes".

The prime minister said although leaders could not last forever, good inspiring leadership should leave its mark on the followers so that even if he was no longer around, the qualities he inspired in his followers remained. -- Bernama