

23/04/1997

Dr M: People must move with the times

A. Kathirasen

PENANG, Tues. - The Prime Minister, citing some peculiar habits about the nasi kandar, the elevator and the way undergarments are put out to dry, today urged Malaysians to discard outdated attitudes in order to progress into the multimedia information age.

Progress, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said, would have no meaning unless Malaysians went along with development adapted to changing times. However, they should not sacrifice ideals and values.

"Our lifestyles must change to keep abreast with modern trends and rapid development taking place in the country. We cannot continue to cling to outmoded thinking.

"For instance, we should be able to accept high-rise living and not continue to insist on living in terrace houses with large compounds.

"High-rise living is the reality today due to lack of land, especially in urban areas.

"Before, we could rear chickens and even cattle below our stilt houses or in our compounds, we could have badminton courts and we could live in bungalow style houses. Now we can't."

Dr Mahathir said there were still people who continued to patronise unhygienic eating shops and stalls where flies were plentiful, rats ran around and excess food thrown into drains or the floor.

For instance, he said, if before a sarong-clad nasi kandar seller served rice using his hands with which he also wiped his sweat and other parts of his body, it should no longer be practised now.

"We cannot have nasi kandar sellers using their hands to scoop rice onto plates in this modern age.

"We must move with the times and incorporate more hygienic practices.

"Food sellers must now be properly attired and observe proper hygiene. This will give meaning to our development."

The Prime Minister said this at the simultaneous launch of the RM90 million Bayan Lepas Expressway and the signing of an agreement between the State Government and Jelutong Development Sdn Bhd to undertake construction of the Jelutong Expressway.

The function was held at Batu Uban this morning.

Also present were Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon, his deputy Datuk Mohd Shariff Omar, Speaker Datuk Yahaya Hamid and State Executive Councillors.

Dr Mahathir said people should not only accept high-rise living but also learn how to live in such an environment as this also gave meaning to development and modern living.

"We must discipline ourselves when we stay in such buildings. For instance, we find that lifts are constantly getting spoilt.

"This is because instead of pressing once, we press many times.

"And sometimes people waiting for lifts press the 'up' button and then the 'down' button. This causes the lift itself to be confused," he said to roaring laughter.

He said that he went on his first lift years ago in the Whiteways building in Penang. It was three-storeys high and there was a lift operator to take people up and down as the lift's operation was a little complicated.

"Today, you don't need an operator. You just press a button. Yet we can't do it properly.

"But at least we are more civilised than some people in Singapore. There people urinate in lifts so the authorities have placed sensors to detect ammonia to catch the culprits. But we don't do it here."

Dr Mahathir criticised flat dwellers for drying all their clothes outside their units for the world to see.

"We hang our underwear like flags. The Triumph and Maidenform and Crocodile brands are there for all to see. We know we all use these but you need not display them outside."

Dr Mahathir suggested that flat dwellers get dryers to dry their clothes within the flat unit. All high-rise buildings, he said, should have such dryers to dry clothes.

With modern living and greater comforts, he said, Malaysians must be willing to spend more to give meaning to life in a successful country.

He also said instead of hundreds of television aerials and satellite dishes giving an ugly look to the buildings, a single aerial or dish should be installed for all the flat dwellers.

"There is no meaning to a successful and progressive nation if we do not learn to live as befits such a people.

"What use would it be if in the year 2020 we say we are a developed nation when we still use our hands to scoop rice? We must change. Then only we can show the world we not only have riches but our lifestyle is also appropriate.

"We want to show we are not inferior to people of other nations. We don't want them to look down on us.

"In a developed country there is no need for the Prime Minister to go around talking about such matters, but the Prime Minister here has to give such advice.

"One day, the Prime Minister of Malaysia can stay in his office and sign documents only and need not travel around telling people how to live."

Dr Mahathir said giving meaning to development also meant ensuring the environment was in good shape.

"Sometimes in the pursuit of development, we forget that development is for us. We think we are for development. We must remember that development is for our benefit and comfort.

"So we must plan carefully our development to ensure the least environmental problems. For instance, Penang is carrying out much reclamation work. We must ensure that it does not result in environmental destruction. Penang's beauty must be maintained.

"We are clever in cutting trees. We even go overseas and cut down trees. Our industrialists appear to be of the opinion that trees should not be vertical but should be horizontal," added the Prime Minister who was in a jovial mood.

He was pleased that Koh was concerned about environmental conservation and said Penang was one of the most developed States.

He was happy with the development taking place.

(END)