

08/09/1997

Learn from Japanese, Germans, Malays told

line Ong; Asiah Bujang

UMNO president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday urged the Malays to look again at Japan, and at Germany, to learn how tailored-for-success cultures can breed success.

Advancing his arguments that the Malays need to change some of their cultural traits to succeed - a dominant theme in his opening address to the 51st Umno general assembly on Friday - Dr Mahathir said "the right culture, a culture compatible with success, will ensure that a race will succeed".

The Prime Minister said both Japan and Germany were crushed during the Second World War. The Japanese, who had a culture of "harakiri", created a culture of hard work and perseverance to emerge today as one of the world's economic superpowers.

Similarly, he added, Germany rose from the ashes of defeat in the hands of Britain and France to become today more economically powerful than those two countries.

Dr Mahathir said he decided to discuss the issues of Malay culture at length in his opening address because he believes that Umno should debate the issue and the need for a new Malay culture compatible with success.

"But I see not too many delegates discussed this issue. I notice that when we have to debate an academic issue like culture, delegates are not too keen. If they can hit the (members of the party's) supreme council, if they can criticise the corporate leaders, they would be more keen to debate."

In his opening address, Dr Mahathir made a call to Malays and Umno members to review some aspects of their culture which he said may have obstructed their progress and could lead them back to backwardness. He also urged them to go beyond the obsession for symbols and forms in their practice of Islam.

Winding up the debates and closing the assembly, Dr Mahathir expressed hope that "we are not less Islam by raising such issues as 'aurat' (the part of the body that must be covered).

"And I hope we do not lose perspective of the priorities in our struggle," he added.

Dr Mahathir said "our endeavour in championing Islam within Umno is to ensure that Islam is not made a scapegoat for our lack of progress.

"If we succeed, others - non-Muslims - will be convinced. But if we allow ourselves to be obsessed by just symbols and forms of Islam, then we will not get far."

He said Umno is not like Pas, "whose idea of Islam is the Islamic dress code. But that is not what will make the world respect Islam. What will is our success in making Muslims a respectable race in the eyes of the world."

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia is "ashamed by the image that our fellow Muslims in some parts of the world, who kill in the name of Islam. We hear of a massacre of Muslims by fellow Muslims who belong to a group claiming to be Islam's salvation".

"It goes on to show that people are using Islam as a mask, as a symbol."

Dr Mahathir said some quarters of accused Umno leaders, including himself, of disrespecting the ulamas (Islamic scholars).

"That's not true," he said. "But who are these people who call themselves ulamas? Just because they belong to a particular party (which

uses the name Islam for the party), are they ulamas? We revere ulamas, but only the real ulamas."

Dr Mahathir also referred to calls by some Umno delegates that want the Government to ban Harakah, the official voice of Pas. He said the Government has never taken action even though Harakah is being sold illegally.

"But because the propoganda by Harakah is so negative, we are now banning its sale in book shops. If Harakah prints lies, it will be charged in court," he added.

At a press conference later, Dr Mahathir said vendors who display or sell copies of Harakah will face action. The Government, however, will not censor or take any action if the contents of Harakah are made available on the Internet.

Bername reports: Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he derives lots of satisfaction from the invaluable achievements of the Government despite the "disappointingly small salary" which the premiership brings.

He said the salary of the prime minister is small compared with that of some officers who work under him and thus he has much cause for feeling disappointed.

"I am very disappointed because my salary is small. Those serving under me are paid bigger salaries, use bigger cars and can use their own planes.

"I am envious. I ought to ask for a bigger salary as prime minister," he said when responding to complaints from delegates who said they were disappointed because they did not get anything even though they had given long and faithful service to the party.

Dr Mahathir said he feels a sense of satisfaction for being able to bring through the Umno struggle a lot of good to the people and the country.

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