

20 AUG 1997

Mahathir-book

MAHATHIR SAYS HE'S INDEBTED TO LATE TUN RAZAK

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 20 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said he is much indebted to second prime minister, the late Tun Abdul Razak Hussein.

Dr Mahathir said he would not be where he is now if not for the late Tun Razak.

"Much of what happened to me was because of Tun (Razak) to the extent the prime minister then, Tun Hussein Onn, picked me as his deputy," said Dr Mahathir.

The prime minister was speaking when launching a book, "Tun Razak - Jejak Bertapak Seorang Patriot" written by Datuk Zainuddin Maidin at the Putra World Trade Centre here today.

Dr Mahathir said he was not close to Hussein Onn but was himself perplexed why he was picked to be Tun Hussein's deputy.

"It was perhaps because of my performance as education minister under Tun Abdul Razak that prompted him to nominate me to Tun Hussein Onn as deputy prime minister," Dr Mahathir said.

"As such, personally I'm grateful to the late Tun Razak. The nation also owed much to the late Tun Razak, who is the father of development," he said.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysians should rightfully be proud of earlier leaders like Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Alhaj, Tun Abdul Razak and Tun Hussein Onn who were all far-sighted.

This was especially so with Tun Razak, who had devoted the best part of his life to bringing about national development upon achieving independence, Dr Mahathir said.

The vision and foresight of Malaysian leaders were commendable unlike those of certain countries which were still left in a vacuum even after attaining independence, he said.

The late Tun Razak deserved credit and be held in high esteem for uplifting Bumiputera economic well-being and living standards to be at par with the other races thus avoiding recurrence of racial strife such as the one in May 1969, he said.

"The New Economic Policy which the late Tun Razak mooted is now a legacy of his struggle to redress racial economic imbalance besides other national development policies which he put first," Dr Mahathir said.

The prime minister commended Zainuddin for coming up with the book in collaboration with the Tun Razak Foundation and Utusan Publications and Distributors Sdn Bhd, the publisher.

In lighter vein, Dr Mahathir said: "Zainuddin or better known as Zam is a friend of mine. Politicians have to befriend journalists, otherwise they'll clobber us flat."

Dr Mahathir said Malaysians should know the country's history so as to love it more and at the same appreciate and respect past leaders who had fought for independence.

"It would be a pity if nothing is done while the leaders are still around. All we need is to ask. There are not many people now who can recall how the country was like before independence," he said.

"Those colonial days and the days after independence are different. We were poor then but now we're well off so much so that foreigners come to earn their living," he said.

Dr Mahathir also compared the attitude of past leaders with the present

ones recalling that the late Tun Razak often cycled to the interior and was always seen with his walking stick.

Unlike the leaders of today, who moved about in Mercedes cars, Dr Mahathir said past leaders also did not push their weight around and were humble.

He hoped Zainuddin's book would serve as a reference to Malaysians of all races, particularly students.

Also present were family members of the late Tun Razak, namely his widow Tun Hajjah Rahah, sons, including Education Minister Datuk Najib Tun Razak and grandchildren.

The 328-paged hardcover book, a pictorial biography of the second prime minister, is priced at RM195.

In his speech, Zainuddin likened the writing of the book to a long walk down memory lane lined with sweet and bitter memories of a journalistic career at a time when the country was still poor.

Zainuddin said his experience of covering the late Tun Razak's visits to the poor districts had made him appreciative of the country's transformation since then. -- BERNAMA

ZAB+SAJ rn