

05 SEP 1997

Mahathir-culture

NEO-MALAY CULTURE KEY TO GREATER ADVANCEMENT, SAYS MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 5 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the Malays can graduate into being an advanced race from a semi-progressive one now provided they adopt a culture tailored for progress and practise what Islam teaches them.

It is not Islam that was blocking the Malays from attaining progress and realising their aspirations, he said.

Instead the obstacle was the very culture shaped by the Malays themselves which they touted as being compatible to Islam but which, in fact, was not, he said.

Dr Mahathir, who is Umno president, said this in the presidential address when opening the party's 1997 general assembly here today.

His address centred on factors contributing to the backwardness of the Malays and their need for a progress-oriented culture.

Dr Mahathir said Umno needed to assume a protagonistic role in shaping a progressive culture for the Malays.

" If Umno is not bold enough to show good example, believe me, the Malays will remain backward, outdated and subject of mockery and ridicule," he said.

Dr Mahathir said to take on the challenges of the modern world, the Malays required self-confidence and not to give up half-way while pursuing their objectives.

He said the Malays should avoid self-deception and the "sour grapes" psychology when their goals eluded them.

There were also those who vented their frustrations the childish way by vandalising property and resorting to terrorism and extremism as had happened in several Muslim states ripped apart by religious extremists, he said.

Dr Mahathir said he was thankful that the Malays were increasingly confident of their own capabilities and adopting the "we can do it" war-cry.

"What do we lack? Physically, mentally and determination-wise we're no different from the other progressive races. The difference is only our culture, value systems and the civilisation that we have evolved," said Dr Mahathir.

He said the Malays needed to evolve a culture that put quality first and a culture of research as that possessed by westerners.

Such cultures were evident by structures built by westerners which stood for more than 1,000 years and their shipbuilding know-how which evolved from making wooden boats to steel craft, he said.

On the contrary, he said, the Malays did not institutionalise sailing as a branch of knowledge which merited research and documentation for later reference for those who wanted to take up sailing.

" We don't draw up detailed route charts and maps. We just guess them," he said.

The prime minister cited the research culture of the Germans who had been able to produce several volumes of books on mosquitoes which in turn led to medical studies on mosquito-borne diseases.

" If it is not for others from different cultures who carried out research, we may have accepted malaria as something natural or worse still, blame God for it," he said.

Dr Mahathir compared the westerners open research culture with that of

the Malay bomohs.

While westerners wrote their research findings in science journals to benefit the people, the Malay medicine men, did not conduct research and were very possessive of their prescriptions which became useless upon their deaths, he said.

Dr Mahathir, however, said not all of the contemporary Malay culture were unsuitable, otherwise the Malays would not have progressed thus far.

The prime minister also touched on Islam's role in transforming the Arabs from a backward to a progressive race whose empire almost covered the whole world.

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The Arabs of those days not only mastered science, mathematics, geography and ancient knowledges of the Greeks and Romans but also maritime disciplines, astronomy, algebra and logarithms, he said.

They also kept records of their research works from which European scientists acquired their knowledge, he said.

The prime minister said the Arabs' achievements bore testimony that Islam was not only for the world hereafter.

But today, the Arabs, although still Muslims, were considered backward not because Islam and Islamic culture were unsuitable to the modern era but because they had neglected many of the Islamic teachings.

For instance, Dr Mahathir said they have returned to their pre-Islamic days of fighting among themselves and ignoring knowledge unrelated to Islam.

On Muslim women, the prime minister said Islam had long emancipated women but injustices towards them still prevailed.

Some parties even blamed the women for all the social ills, he said.

It was thought that segregating them from the men was the answer to the problems but even so the men's behaviour did not improve because of such move, he said.

" We are ashamed to acknowledge that in this country certain lust-driven crimes are committed more often by (Muslim) Malays than the non-Malays," he said.

It was not that Islamic teachings were at fault, he said, but the Malays themselves,

"It's us that are at fault... we are too obsessed with covering the aurat rather than its effect on our morals," he added. -- BERNAMA

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