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Mahathir-Language

PM: DISCOURAGING ENGLISH A DISSERVICE TO THE MALAYS

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 5 (Bernama) -- Malay parents who discourage their children from mastering English for "nationalistic" reasons are doing a great disservice to the Malays themselves, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

By doing this, they were actually depriving the Malays from acquiring vital knowledge to develop the community itself as well as the nation, he said when opening the Umno general assembly at the Putra World Trade Centre here.

Dr Mahathir, who is also Umno president, wants the Malays to realise that they will not be less nationalistic and patriotic if they master other languages compared to nationalists who are only proficient in their mother tongue.

" If a particular race is forced to redeem its dignity by mastering another language and acquiring knowledge in this language, they are in fact far more nationalistic compared with those who only shout at the top of their voice about their so-called sense of nationalism," said the prime minister.

Dr Mahathir spoke of the need for the Malays to acquire the "language of knowledge" in his presidential policy speech entitled " Redeeming the Dignity of the Malays and Islam", a recurring theme which he stresses on at the annual gathering of the country's largest political party.

"In our efforts to redeem the dignity of our race, it is very important that we pursue knowledge in whatever languages. If we need to provide ample time for this purpose, then we have to be willing to do it.

" Hard work, diligence and patience or time are necessary in acquiring knowledge. If we do this, God willing, we shall succeed, we can develop our race, and we can be the real masters if this is what we aspire to be," he said.

Over 1,900 delegates from 165 Umno divisions are attending the three-day assembly. Also present at the opening ceremony were leaders of the other 12 component parties of the ruling Barisan Nasional coalition and foreign ambassadors.

Dr Mahathir said the Umno-led government had provided the necessary facilities for acquiring knowledge and languages of knowledge.

" However, there are many (Malay) parents who think differently, including being not interested in having their children acquire knowledge vital for developing their own race and country," he said.

"Instead they want their children to acquire a deep sense of the so-called Malay nationalism. They do not encourage their children to seriously master the English language, for instance," he said.

The prime minister said still there were Malay parents who wanted their children only to become religious people knowledgeable only in Islamic religious studies.

" Because of this, the talented among these children are unable to pursue other forms of knowledge which they would have mastered with ease," he added.

As a result, when they qualified in religious studies, their children's job opportunities were limited, thus depriving them from seeking highly-paid jobs.

This being the case, they would feel let down and begin to regard society as being unfair to them.

"And they vent their anger on society especially other people who are knowledgeable in other fields and who are better off in life than themselves. And they get angry with the government which they label as secular. It is in this troubled water that many will be fishing," said Dr Mahathir.

The prime minister said this did not mean that the government was not giving emphasis on religious studies, as could be seen from the fact that the facilities for such studies were far better today than in the past and that anyone wanting to pursue religious knowledge now could do so even to the highest level.

" But what will happen to the Muslim community if the knowledge that they have is only limited to only religious matters, religious laws and fiqh. There won't become medical doctors, engineers, army generals, businessmen and entrepreneurs, farmers and others who are vital for the well-being of society in their midst," he asked.

He said Malaysia greatly needed people educated in various fields of knowledge who could help the country compete successfully with others and having enough such people would also mean that the government had accomplished its responsibility as required by Islam.

But Dr Mahathir admitted that comments made on Islamic religious studies were highly sensitive because anyone who said that Muslims should study fields of knowledge other than their religion would be branded as less Islamic.

"Umno as a political party should not be afraid of being accused of not giving priority to Islam. When we plan the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC), we actually strive to save Muslims in these ever challenging times as well for the future," he said.

The prime minister said although he did not dismiss the possibility of projects like the MSC being abused and could give rise to undesirable problems to society, he remained confident that if the people acquired the information technology, the negative aspect of this technological invasion would be overcome.

" Of course it is easy to criticise the MSC by claiming that the Corridor of Mecca project is better. But claims of making the state of Kelantan as the Corridor of Mecca have long been made," he said in an obvious reference to PAS, the party which rules Kelantan and which wants to turn the state into the Corridor of Mecca, Islam's holy city.

MSC is the 15km by 50km hub between the Kuala Lumpur City Centre here and Putrajaya, the new federal government administrative capital to the south.

He described plans for the Corridor of Mecca as a PAS political propaganda to gain power while Kelantan today also had its fair share of incidence of drug abuse, AIDS and vice.--BERNAMA

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