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`Remain united to retain independence'

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Malaysians must remain united if the country is to retain its independence and continue to have a strong Government, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said unity was just as important now as when the nation freed itself from British colonisation.

He was addressing about 3,000 land scheme settlers from Felcra, Risda and other regional development authorities under the Rural Development Ministry at the Putra World Trade Centre.

At the gathering, themed Cinta Negara Warga Desa, he also presented a mock cheque for RM155.5 million in dividends for about 60,000 Felcra settlers.

"We were insulted so much so that we did not have confidence in ourselves and that affected our work and abilities in business and education and the use of knowledge for our benefit. Our self-respect was eroded and we did not respect ourselves," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the people then did not know how to administer and thought only foreigners could rule the country. This went on until the Japanese, an Asian race, occupied the country. He said it was realised then that Asians could vanquish a Western race and slowly self-confidence surfaced so that when the British returned and planned to become permanent colonisers it was not allowed to happen.

"We realised we could not allow that and became united and no longer thought ourselves as subjects of one State or another. So important was unity then that because of that unity we overcame the British.

"That unity is still important today as we need to be united to form strong Governments and defend our independence."

Dr Mahathir asked how the public would react if those present were to take to the streets to riot, damage shops and stone the police.

"Traders would not be able to conduct business. Workers would be laid off and have no income. So we do not like riots. We have elections. If you don't like a person, you don't vote for him.

"Tomorrow, Muslims begin fasting, but fasting is not only about eating and not eating but also about controlling our nafsu."

Dr Mahathir said if Muslims learned how to control their desires they would be capable of defending Islam, not only in Malaysia but anywhere in the world.

Dr Mahathir said although the US claimed the attacks on Iraq were due to the Iraqi threat to neighbours like Kuwait, Syria, Palestine and Jordan, the claim was a mere "fairy tale".

Dr Mahathir also launched a book, The Second Transformation of Rural Areas - A Commitment, by Rural Development Minister Datuk Annuar Musa.

In conjunction with Dr Mahathir's 73rd birthday tomorrow, a large replica of a cake was lowered from the ceiling of the hall. Prayers were also recited for his health.

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