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Dr Mahathir pleads Bumi students' cause

Zubaidah Abu Bakar; Sharanjit Singh

ALOR STAR, Tues. - The Prime Minister today appealed to teachers to play a greater role in ensuring students concentrate on their studies and are not easily distracted.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad choked and halted for a few moments while making the appeal in front of about 1,000 teachers, students and villagers.

This happened when Dr Mahathir was in the midst of launching Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Sultanah Asma's Citibank Smartlab.

He was talking about how Bumiputera students were capable of achieving good results similar to other races but failed to live up to expectations because they were easily diverted and did not concentrate on their studies.

"They get involved in all kinds of things, including politics, and hold demonstrations ... We want them to study hard and be just as good as other races but they are influenced by certain people and as a result are left far behind," he said.

He urged teachers to play a greater role in ensuring students concentrated on their studies.

He said if the problem was not addressed fast, Bumiputera students would be left far behind other races and this could lead to bigger problems later.

"It could lead to jealousy and cause political instability. It is very disappointing when students start demonstrating instead of concentrating on their studies.

"I ask and plead with teachers to help close the achievement gap between Bumiputera students and other races..."

At this point, the Prime Minister suddenly stopped talking and tried to hold back his tears. Upon realising what had happened, the crowd clapped their hands as a sign of support and prompted him to continue with his speech.

He then wrapped up his speech by declaring the lab officially open.

Also present were his wife Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, Menteri Besar Tan Sri Sanusi Junid, his wife Puan Sri Nila Inangda Manyam Keumala, Education Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak and Information Minister Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob.

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