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Role of teachers in imparting values

KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said teachers were not only responsible for imparting knowledge to students but values as well.

The Prime Minister said this would ensure that students developed a strong mind and were able to reject negative traits.

Dr Mahathir, speaking at a Teachers' Day gathering at the Mines International Exhibition Centre today, said:

"We have to ensure that the knowledge and information will be put to good use when they grow up. If their minds are weak, they can easily embrace a negative culture."

He said the West was trying to propagate beliefs like individual freedom and that one could do anything they wanted without interference or objection.

"It may bring progress but I don't think it will last. We are witnessing today the breaking up of society where children no longer respect their teachers or parents.

"It is also in this society that we find students carrying firearms to school and using them to kill their friends and teachers," he said, adding that this was happening because their culture idolised absolute freedom.

He asked whether such a culture should be emulated, saying that only those who felt inferior would do so without question.

Emphasising the importance of building a society that upholds values, Dr Mahathir said teachers should look beyond monetary gains for satisfaction.

He felt it would be more rewarding for them to know that they had contributed towards the success of their students and society.

More than 5,000 teachers and Education Ministry officials attended the function, including Education Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak.

Speaking on the dangers of allowing one's mindset to be "colonised", Dr Mahathir said efforts by outsiders to make the people submit to their way of thinking had been successful to a certain extent.

He said he had to always remind the people to be wary of such attempts because the threats were real.

He added that the reminders were not designed to divert the people's attention from internal problems as claimed by some quarters.

"There is no need to do this as we are not facing any problems. In fact, we have succeeded in various areas."

Dr Mahathir said colonisation could come in other means like through the suppression of the mind but the effect would be the same.

"If we are weak and follow easily what other people say, we are actually being colonised.

"This is all happening around us. Countries which were once free now had to bow to demands and directives from outsiders like in changing their governments and systems," he said.

Dr Mahathir said many wanted to see Malaysia go down that they boldly predicted a year ago that the country would beg for outside assistance to overcome the economic crisis.

"But we have succeeded without such aid. Our ways which have been heavily criticised before are now accepted."

Dr Mahathir spoke on the serious challenge faced by the country where others were trying to change the culture and values like advocating profanity, crude words and ill-manners.

"They want our society to become docile and cannot think for itself.

Whether we will be able to overcome this depends on the role of teachers."

Dr Mahathir said some of the people, who were proud to ape the West, were already influenced by this culture.

He said the progress of society depended on its culture, thus the importance of ensuring that the young were brought up accordingly.

Education director-general Datuk Dr Abdul Shukor Abdullah said effective teachers were loyal to their profession.

"As a civil servant, teachers must also be loyal to the Government of the day, and practise neutrality and impartiality. The society wants teachers only to focus on their jobs, that is teaching and learning."

During the celebrations today, the highest accolade in the teaching profession - Tokoh Guru 1999 - was presented to five teachers who had contributed significantly in the field of education.

They were retired teachers Molly Chong, who had served in, among others, schools in Sarikei, Sri Aman and Kuching in Sarawak; Mohd Mokhtar Talib, also a prolific writer, who gave 31 years of his life to the profession; Rahmah Hussain, who served 32 years; Hambali Abdul Razak, who had also been conferred the Anugerah Cemerlang Maal Hijrah and Kasim Muhammad who had also been awarded the Tokoh Guru Perak.

Other awards presented were for excellent teachers in special education, excellent schools, innovative teachers, and for winning children's story writing contest in Bahasa Malaysia and English categories.

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