

29/11/1999

Why we choose to emulate the Japanese

K. Nagaratnam

RECENTLY 30 students from a Japanese university came on a study tour of Singapore and Malaysia. They spent four days in Singapore, three days in Johor Baru, two days in Malacca, another four in Kuala Lumpur and the final three days in Penang before returning home.

While they were in Kuala Lumpur, they made a two-hour visit to The Little Sisters of the Poor Home for the Aged in Cheras. The Mother Superior gave a brief history of this home in English which was translated to Japanese by their leader.

When they had finished speaking, the Japanese girl who was seated next to me smiled and told me, "I come from Japan." I replied with a smile, "When I went to Japan, you were not born yet."

After that, I began conversing with them in Japanese. They were so happy that they crowded around me and began praising Malaysia's progress which had impressed them very much.

They enjoyed Malaysian food very much. They thought Malaysians were very friendly and our hospitality fantastic.

Our Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is very popular among Japanese children. They told me that whenever he goes to Japan, he visits various industries to get new ideas to improve Malaysia and is given maximum publicity.

About 15 minutes before their departure from this home, all of them said, "Naga-san, we have one final question to ask, which nobody has answered convincingly."

They observed that TV2 and TV3 showed a clock indicating five minutes past nine, while it was only 8pm in Malaysia.

As a veteran Toastmaster, I had to do some quick thinking in 10 seconds and said, "I must congratulate all of you for being very observant. You see, Dr Mahathir implemented the Look East Policy a few years ago to emulate the Japanese.

"During World War Two when Allied planes dropped the atom bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, both places lost thousands of lives and all buildings were brought down to ashes.

"With sincere determination and efficient work, the Japanese people rebuilt Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In addition, they have become the second most powerful nation in the world, which is a shining example for Malaysians to emulate.

"When it is 8pm in Malaysia, it is 9pm in Tokyo, but we have it five minutes faster (9.05pm) to remind Malaysians to emulate the Japanese and if possible, to be five minutes ahead of them."

The Japanese were very happy and gave a big round of applause.