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Dr M: Change may be needed for race to progress

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - In a thought-provoking address to Bumiputera professionals, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad raised several issues on their resourcefulness, culture and values.

The Prime Minister said a race could succeed on the strength of the values it subscribed to and its cultural roots. And if its values and culture were detrimental to the community, then they could be replaced with better ones.

This was essential if the race wanted to continue to develop, Dr Mahathir told 1,200 participants of the Young Malay Professionals Congress. The two-day congress is jointly organised by Mara and Ansara, an association of former students of Mara junior science colleges.

Dr Mahathir said although cultural change would take time and cause tremendous shock, it could be done.

"All races have the same capabilities. No one race or ethnic group is more capable than another."

Giving a historical perspective to his statement, he said: "When the jahiliah (pre-Islamic) Arabs began to assimilate good and noble values from Islam, they became a noble race, dignified and highly civilised."

Another example were the Mongols who emerged from a nomadic race split in smaller, warring ethnic groups to become a united and disciplined force under Genghis Khan. Their changed culture brought them success, with an empire stretching from China to Hungary.

As for the Malays, Dr Mahathir said they were under Western colonisation for 450 years and quite happy to receive "political pension", and having their country and economy managed by outsiders.

But this gradually changed, and the Malays began to assert themselves and embraced a culture of change to become more progressive.

"It took a very long time, but change they did."

"In 42 years, a dignified, modern and respected race rose. But it's not yet matured and has not reached its full potential. And the sad fact is that there are already signs that this fragile, young civilisation is about to decline rather quickly."

He cited the lackadaisical attitude of the Malays as one of the reasons why they were too easily satisfied, involved in power grabbing and were enemies with each other.

"If these tendencies are not addressed, this modern civilisation which we are steadily nurturing will fall. As it is only 40 years old, there may be no meaningful legacy that can be left behind. All our efforts in the four decades since independence will be futile."

He also drew reference to democracy, saying that extreme adherence to it had led to some changes in the culture of the Malays. The sense of discipline, courtesy, politeness and nationalism were now being gradually replaced with a more liberal attitude and unlimited personal freedom.

"Are we bored with the civilisation we just raised? Or do we believe that the changes now taking place based in liberal western democracy bring more good and development at a faster rate?"

Dr Mahathir also touched on the economic status of the Malays and the efforts of the West to dictate the world economy through globalisation.

He said the concept of globalisation was created because foreign capitalists saw that the development of telecommunication technology could be used to monopolise trade activities worldwide, and through that,

politics.

As such, "change for the sake of change" does not reflect the maturity of the Malays, and that careful evaluation must be done before change was implemented.

However, he said although the Malays were faced with many challenges in the face of globalisation, they did not need to reject change outright.

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