

04/11/2000

Malays who do not measure up

Carolyn Hong

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today expressed disappointment in Malays whose achievements had fallen short of the Government's efforts to assist them.

The Prime Minister said they could not blame their former colonial masters or other people as the country was now independent although 43 years might not be enough time to make great progress.

Their fate is in their own hands, and God only helps those who help themselves.

They should not claim that God has forbidden their success as their own efforts are still inadequate.

"I know I will be severely criticised for exposing our weaknesses as Malays and Bumiputeras.

"But criticism is preferable to seeing our own race being left further behind. It's irresponsible to emphasise one's popularity over improving one's own community."

The Prime Minister was speaking when launching Rida-Mara's Golden Jubilee celebrations.

Rida or the Rural Industrial Development Industry was the forerunner to Mara.

He said some became very angry when the weaknesses and wrongdoings of Malays were pointed out as they chose to blame other people instead.

However, he said they must not give up hope. Mara is still relevant and he is confident it can achieve better results.

"We know our weaknesses. We only need to rectify them and by God's grace, we will achieve success.

"We are not less intelligent but intellect needs to be honed towards excellence."

He said without Mara, many prominent Malays would not be here today but at the same time, Malays should not be overly proud of themselves.

"We should actually be disappointed when we compare the efforts made with the results achieved."

He said the success of any race relied almost entirely on its values.

Taking the example of tin mining, he said many Malays had owned land rich in tin ore but instead of learning to mine, they leased it out to non-Malays.

"Why did this happen? Because Malays like to take the easy way."

He said Rida was set up in 1951 by the British to buy support for the Malayan Union.

At that time, they thought the Malays' problems were due to lack of capital but while this was so, the bigger problem was their values and culture.

After taking over Rida, Mara had spent billions to help Malays and other Bumiputeras participate in almost all sectors of the economy.

But not only have their achievements fallen short of the efforts or funds expended, many have become ungrateful.

"Some get angry when they are asked to repay their loans. Even worse, this attitude was deliberately incited by those who have other interests."

He said Mara had done a lot for the Malays including spending RM5 billion to send more than 160,000 students abroad since 1966, besides training another 300,000 in Mara institutions.

On top of that, RM1.2 billion had been given out in loans to 129,000

people and 4,433 retail and factory premises rented out to Bumiputeras.

He said the Government had also set up a project to encourage Bumiputeras run shops in new townships when it found too few Malays in the retail business because "they are more interested in big Government contracts".

Dr Mahathir urged the Malays to use these opportunities well, saying they were betraying the Government if they did things like selling subsidised fertilisers or using EPF computer withdrawals on frivolous purchases.

He said no government in the world had made a greater effort than Malaysia in trying to uplift its people and to distribute wealth fairly.

Dr Mahathir also questioned why only 35 per cent of the Bumiputera undergraduates were males.

"There are some who feel that this problem can be solved by raising the Bumiputera quota. Are we to accept those with low qualifications just to raise the number of male students?"

"Actually, the number of intake is not important. What's important is those who get their degrees, especially higher degrees."

Speaking to reporters later, he said the Government would study the problem to identify if men were actually studying elsewhere or simply refused to study as they preferred to rely on their wives.

Dr Mahathir presented awards to the former chairmen and directors-general of Mara. The Tokoh Rida-Mara award went to Tan Sri Arshad Ayob who was Institut Teknologi Mara's (now university) first director.

Rida was set up in 1951 to raise rural living standards. Its first chairman was Datuk Onn Jaafar. In 1966, it was revamped and became Mara.

(END)