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Melayu Baru: Learned, courageous, of unflinching faith

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today defined "Melayu Baru" (New Malay) as one who is learned, courageous in facing challenges and whose faith in Islam is unflinching.

Melayu Baru are also trustworthy, sincere, broadminded, tolerant and would not easily brand other Muslims as being un-Islamic, he added.

"The Melayu Baru are not alcoholics, gamblers, womanisers, and do not reject Islam and Malay customs like what is being attempted to be portrayed by those who wish to see the Malays backward and unable to deal with modern-day challenges," he said.

Dr Mahathir said this when opening a symposium on "Malay Identity in the 21st Century" organised by Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris.

In this respect, he said, those pursuing courses at teacher training colleges must be well-trained to ensure they are able to inculcate the new Malay culture into pupils.

He said this was important to help the Malay community change and progress and to compete with other races without compromising their identity and religion.

"Teachers have a big role to play to help create the Melayu Baru culture. And to ensure they have the ability to inculcate noble values to create the new Malay, Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris and other teacher training colleges have an important role to play," he said.

Dr Mahathir said these efforts would help mould personalities who had all the qualities to ensure their progress and that of their race, religion and country.

"Previously, we lost out when we rejected the learning of English, as we feared this would make us embrace Christianity. This rejection caused the Malay community to lag behind in the mastery of the various aspects of knowledge."

Dr Mahathir spoke at length about Za'aba, a scholar who, during his lifetime, was a model of a Malay who had global views and vision.

"His views were not just relevant during his time but also in dealing with problems after that. Za'aba stressed the need to understand other languages besides our own."

He said the Sultan Idris Teacher Training College (the predecessor of the university) had played a vital role in instilling awareness among the Malays of their potential.

The college had also produced Malay leaders who were instrumental in freeing the country from the clutches of colonialism.

"This legacy must be continued with the university helping to produce leaders of calibre and distinction who are equipped with modern knowledge without compromising their religious beliefs and who can lead this country."

Dr Mahathir, who later launched the Za'aba Chair at the university, said this was not only in recognition of the scholar's contributions but to allow future generations to remember and grasp his philosophy and struggles.

"The reforms in Za'aba's thoughts are not static.

"They are dynamic and it's up to future generations to ensure the continued success of his struggles," he said.

He also launched the Global Encyclopaedia and Za'aba Chair website (www.malayglobal.com), a joint venture between the university, Malaysian

Encyclopaedia Research Centre and DEMC ANZAGAIN, a subsidiary of Darul Ehsan Multimedia Corporation. He also received donations from four companies to fund them.

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