

16/05/2000

PM submits to a `grilling'

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KUANTAN, Mon. - Youths attending the National Youths Day celebrations caught a glimpse of the personal side of Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad when he consented to an interview session.

The questions posed ranged from how he viewed youths in the country, whether he had ever dreamt of becoming Prime Minister and the secrets of his youthful look, to how he find time to relax in between his busy schedule.

Dr Mahathir's wife, Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, was not spared either, but she sportingly told the youths the qualities of Dr Mahathir that attracted her to him and how she coped with the ever busy Prime Minister.

The session was held after Dr Mahathir opened the celebrations at the indoor stadium of Kompleks Sukpa in Bandar Indera Mahkota here.

To a question how he "switched off" his mind to rest, Dr Mahathir replied that he found horse-riding very relaxing.

"Whenever I want to take a rest from politics, I go riding. I find it relaxing... perhaps it is because one has to concentrate on controlling the horse or risk a bad fall."

He then let them in on a secret - he had suffered three falls but not during his recent South American trip when he was rumoured to have suffered serious injuries after falling from a horse.

Dr Mahathir said he could not afford to take too much rest as there was much work to do.

The Prime Minister was also asked whether he had made plans even in his youth to assume the highest post in the country, and whether his family supported or objected to his joining politics.

"I had not thought of becoming PM ... I think Tunku (the country's first PM Tunku Abdul Rahman) also did not dream of becoming one. We were just doing our part for the country, and with it came along the post.

"My father and friends supported my joining politics. I remembered the time when we made (political) posters and pasted them on walls at night, taking the risk of being caught as a curfew was in force then."

On how he viewed youths nowadays, Dr Mahathir said they were more educated, possessed ideals which augured well for the country and were concerned about the well-being of the people.

"You should present your ideals in a civilised manner so that it will not create resistance among the intended target groups."

On his secret formula for looking young, Dr Mahathir remarked that perhaps it was because he did not wear a moustache or beard.

"I don't know why some young people sport moustache and beard," he quipped, to laughter from those present.

To a poser on ways to bridge the gap between the older and younger generation, Dr Mahathir said it was a bit difficult as they grew up in a different environment.

"For example, the youths during my time were preoccupied with attaining independence. We did not have to face much problems like dadah addiction, a society divided by politics and being influenced by a corrupt culture from the West with its books, films and so on.

"The main question before us now is whether we are capable of deflecting these negative influences and instead developing a positive culture and healthy lifestyle. If we failed, the youths will grow up corrupted and the

society will be destroyed."

Dr Mahathir was also asked about challenges facing youths in the country.

He reminded them that Malaysians must be cautious of phrases and terms advocated by the West like globalisation, world without borders and market forces.

He said the real meaning and intention of these words must be understood well as they were actually methods propagated by the West in another attempt to re-colonise the world.

The Prime Minister told the youths that if Malaysians were to let their guard down, foreigners would gradually try to control the economy before stamping their powers on the country's politics.

"This is the challenge facing youths... if they are not careful, we will be colonised again. Remember, we have achieved independence once but it does not mean that we will forever remain one."

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