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PM: Master the latest technologies

Ahmad A. Talib; Mustapha Kamil in Chicago

MALAYSIAN students must master the latest technologies and the new world order in preparation to inherit the country from the older generation, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said.

He reminded about 350 Malaysian students in Chicago not to jeopardise what they would themselves inherit one day, but to instead be prepared to return home to help Malaysia develop further.

The students attended a three-hour session with the Prime Minister and Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali. They came from various US states, some driving for eight hours.

Speaking to reporters later, Dr Mahathir said he had a cordial meeting with the students. "Largely they understood their responsibilities and were full of desire to excel in their studies and displayed much maturity," he said.

Meanwhile, during a question-and-answer session, the students were more interested in knowing the country's economic situation.

Earlier in his speech, Dr Mahathir said the older generation now administering Malaysia would hand over their duties to the younger Malaysians but the present development around the world needed careful planning before that could be done.

Technology was tearing down national borders and developments in the international financial scene would continue to have an impact on Malaysia.

"You can only take over if you have enough knowledge in the new economy, technology and the new world. It is complex but if you do not understand these, we may all lose out in the end."

That is the rationale behind the Government's continued investment in sending the students overseas.

He urged students to commit their time to studying, to first honour the trust taxpayers had put in them in preparing the country's future leaders. When they come back, he said the students could go into politics if they liked.

The meeting was well attended and in the "full-house" hall in Rosemont, Illinois, Dr Mahathir said the students were the nation's owners.

However, he said some had preferred to spend more time on politics than studying and was saddened that hate campaigns were mounted against the Government and himself by some quarters who were out to seek political mileage.

"Please determine first whether these campaigns are facts or mere attempts to incite hatred against the ruling Government," he said.

Some hated the ruling Government but only said they would not vote for the ruling party. "That's fine," he said.

However, others have taken bold steps including trying to topple the Government by force, he said, citing the recent arms heist in Sauk by the Al-Ma'unah group.

In explaining the rule of law practised in Malaysia, he cited the former Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's conviction as an example, saying no one was above the law.

He thought the nine-year sentence Anwar received for sodomy was a bit long. "But I heard the presiding judge was cross as Anwar called him names and had little respect for the courts." In Malaysia, the courts have their own stand.

In the question-and-answer session, he also said while the Government understood that not all from races other than Bumiputeras were rich, more from the indigenous people were poorer and thus required assistance from the Government, especially in financing their studies.

For those the Government is not able to help financially, it has lowered the cost of further education considerably by establishing more universities in Malaysia.

Meanwhile Dr Mahathir also met 15 Muslim senior executives and entrepreneurs in IT companies based in the Silicon Valley and three business groups who made business proposals for Malaysia's considerations.

He also met chairman of the Council on American-Islamic Relations who was interested in collaborating with Malaysia in projecting the correct image of Islam around the world and in understanding the American system in relation to the religion.

In the evening he attended a gathering organised by the Malaysia Club of Chicago, where he outlined latest developments in Malaysia's economic and political scenes.

He encouraged Malaysians staying around Chicago to consider coming home to assist in the country's industrialisation drive. The gathering was attended by more than 300 members of the club.

Dr Mahathir later left for New York where he was scheduled to meet Cuban leader President Fidel Castro and attend a Group of 77 countries meeting at the UN headquarters.

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