

01/01/2000

PM: Unite to face new millennium

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Malaysians should close ranks and set aside differences to face the new millennium with resilience and strength, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said tonight.

The Prime Minister, in his annual New Year message, said this would take the country towards greater success and "our beloved nation will continue to be free, independent and successful".

He also reminded Malaysians to be vigilant to avoid becoming victims in the wave of globalisation, a trend which he described as the challenge of the new millennium and of a Western creation.

"Malaysians should greet the new century and millennium with joy. But we cannot accept wholeheartedly the globalisation which will accompany it," he said in a televised speech over RTM, as Malaysians celebrated the last hours of 1999 and waited to ring in the new century.

Recalling the many failed Western ideologies like feudalism, absolute monarchy, dictatorship, communism and socialism, he said the current liberal democracy and free capitalism systems would also not last.

Globalisation, he said, would also go the same way but before an ideology was rejected, many would be sacrificed.

He wanted Malaysians to be wary to avoid becoming victims.

"Are we ready to face and overcome this challenge?" he asked.

He said it would appear that Malaysians had forgotten the lessons of history, referring specifically to the country's long periods of colonisation. Quoting Western philosopher and writer George Santayana, he said those who did not learn from history were condemned to repeat their mistakes.

Drawing two lessons from Portugal's conquest of Malacca in 1511, Dr Mahathir said one of them was the importance of unity, organisation, a responsible leadership, discipline and order, clear direction, training and strategy.

The other lesson was that traitors could bring the downfall of a country.

"Those who collaborate with enemies are worse than the enemies. Because of self-interest, they are willing to sell their country and race," he said.

Looking at these lessons, he said it was clear that Malaysians were not yet ready to face the challenge of the new millennium.

The old ways and culture which had brought four and a half centuries of colonisation continue to be prevalent, especially among the Malays.

He said the people did not see the need for unity because the Government had always protected them, brought development and deflected foreign pressure.

There were some, he said, who felt that the Government's protection of the weak was unfair discrimination and not in line with Islamic teachings.

"Fighting for the race and country was no longer important. What was important was fighting for the benefits even though this would have destroyed our unity," he said.

But this had failed, he said, and Malaysians of all races had ensured that the country would continue to have a dynamic Government which could face the new challenges.

"But the seeds of discord have been sown and are growing. Foreign propaganda has been accepted by some people and is being spread by them.

"It does not matter that there is no basis to the accusations by the foreigners. What is important is that the accusations are easily believed and can be used for their fight," he said.

Dr Mahathir said while the Government was concentrating on defending the country from outside forces, they found it the best time to strike from behind.

He urged Malaysians to unite and set aside the differences which divided them in order to face challenges with resilience and to remember the lessons of history.

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