

03/09/2000

PM: It doesn't matter what other people think of me

Patvinder Singh

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said it did not matter what posterity thought of him as long as he was satisfied that he had served the people well.

He said in a televised interview tonight that he did not mind what Malaysians thought of him as there would always be some who supported him and some who did not.

"That is what history is all about. Some will praise and others will denounce," he told Grace Chen, TVBS Asia's anchorwoman, in an interview which was recorded in Putrajaya in the middle of last month.

"I do not really mind what they think of me. What I consider important is whether I have served them well or not. Even if they do not acknowledge, it does not matter because by the time you retire ... eventually you will die. What difference does it make what people think of you?"

Asked if he had any regrets during his 18 years in office, Dr Mahathir said: "No, no regrets. I may have made some mistakes. For example, I have encouraged the steel industry in this country. I have allowed extremism to show itself in this country. These are some of the mistakes I have made."

Chen said some articles in Western countries criticised the idea of Malaysia Incorporated as being one of corruption and nepotism and asked how well it had helped to develop the economy and downplay racial differences.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia Incorporated was based on the idea that both the Government and the private sector had a stake in the country and that whatever each did would affect the nation.

"There is no reason why we cannot work together. When you work together, you get to know people. We don't favour anyone. But if they (the private sector) have a good proposition, we cannot say that because we know you, therefore, we cannot give it to you. It is all based on the proposition.

"But Western countries like to criticise this because they cannot understand why a backward country like Malaysia can develop and they would like to have a piece of this country," he said.

Dr Mahathir said when there was privatisation of an entity, foreigners liked to own it 100 per cent.

"Here we don't allow 100 per cent but 30 per cent equity. This makes them very unhappy because they want to take over everything, own everything, mint money and take money out of the country. We, on the other hand, have to think of the country, develop the country, make things to sell to the world."

Dr Mahathir was also asked if someone of Chinese descent could become the Prime Minister in the near future. He said it was possible if the person got the support of all the communities.

"At the moment, I doubt if there is anyone who will get the support, but over the years when eventually identification of race will be less, when all the races are evenly balanced, when everybody is able to get a piece of the wealth of this country and there are no more racial feelings, at that stage a person of Chinese descent can become PM.

"The feelings of race are still very strong. The Chinese still feel very Chinese. The Malays, of course, feel that they are Malays and not just anybody. The Indians also feel the same.

"So the racial feelings are still very strong in Malaysia although they

are prepared to work together to live in harmony with each other. But to accept a leader from the Chinese community which is a minority community in Malaysia, it is not yet possible," he said.

Chen asked Dr Mahathir to define former Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's case in the light of his (Dr Mahathir's) many years of political service.

The Prime Minister said it was one of the cases that involved government leaders and that in the past such leaders had been charged in court and sentenced.

"One of them was sentenced to death. In this country, any leader who breaks the law must accept that he has to face the consequences. In the case of Anwar, it is the same as any other government leader in the country. We take this as something normal."

Asked what his philosophy of leadership was, given he was the longest-serving elected leader in Asia, he said as a leader he must understand he was responsible for the country and people.

"Not for myself. I must not think of personal gain as being important at all. I would like to see while I am in office that changes for the better take place. For that I know I have to work very hard."

Chen also asked how Malaysia would compete with the four Tigers of Asia - Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea and Singapore - and what advantage the country had.

Dr Mahathir replied Malaysia had a very big project in the 15km by 60km Multimedia Super Corridor where new laws, practices and infrastructure were being implemented.

(END)