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What Malays need to be true masters

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I WOULD like to thank the Association of Former Students of Mara Junior Science Colleges (Ansara) for inviting me to officiate at the Young Malay Professionals Congress today.

I am proud of the organiser's initiative to assemble about 1,000 young Malay professionals from various levels, work disciplines and services to discuss matters which are very relevant to the future of our race, religion and country.

I was made to understand that this congress will discuss the role and future direction of young Malay professionals in the country's economic development, especially in the scenario of world economic globalisation in the new millennium. For that, the theme of this congress - "Malay Professionalism in Facing the Economic Challenge" is appropriate indeed.

Surely, this title was chosen because you are not happy with the capability and role of the Malays in dealing with the challenging economy.

Previously, our struggle was to gain independence. Of course, in an independent country we can rule ourselves; we do not want to remain as beggars and as the poorest group among its population. This sort of independence would be meaningless.

If we talk about Malay dominance, and we like to talk about it so much, does it mean that we become "masters" just because we are no longer being colonised? Even if we are addressed as "master", a "master" who lives like a beggar is not really a "master".

We cannot become a real "master" just because we want to be a "master". If we want to become a master, we must possess certain capabilities. We must be knowledgeable, efficient and successful in all endeavours and own a reasonable amount of wealth. For that, we have to embark on certain efforts.

Whether the efforts will succeed depends on our characteristics - characteristics which are moulded according to the values and culture that we have and practise.

There are some with the opinion that the success of a race depends on their ancestry and colour of their skin. They are of the opinion that Caucasians, Chinese, Japanese and Koreans have certain inborn characteristics that help them to succeed.

There are others with the opinion that those who are sawo matang (tanned brown complexion) are lacking in various fields and unable to master certain knowledge and skills.

It is said that the Malays cannot excel in business, hence the old Malay pantun which reads:

Buai laju-laju,  
Sampai balik sana,  
Beli baju baru,  
Dari kedai Cina.

Shops, to the Malays, must be owned by Chinese. Similarly, experts in whatever fields must be Chinese. The Malays have no shops and cannot become experts.

But the success of a race in any field depends on its culture and values, particularly those values that are actually practised. If a race has cultural values that are in harmony with success, they will succeed. If not, they won't.

Will a race be forever backward if its culture is incompatible with

success? This may be true, but it does not have to be... If there is a consciousness, interest and confidence, an unsuitable culture can be changed to that which suits success.

All races have the same capabilities. No one race or ethnic group is more capable than another. History has proven this. When a suitable culture is assimilated, a backward race can become a progressive race that controls the world.

A perfect example is the pre-Islamic Jahiliah Arabs. They were ignorant and had a culture that accepted the killing of their own daughters and fostered hostility among other tribes. They were conceited and short-tempered.

After Prophet Muhammad S.A.W. revealed the teachings of Islam, the killing of baby girls was prohibited, blind loyalty to one's tribe was abolished and noble Islamic values were accepted. Thus, the formerly primitive race rose and progressed rapidly. Within a century, this culture's growth allowed it to build empires from Spain to the China.

Through interaction with other races, they mastered knowledge, including mathematics in which they pioneered high standards and introduced digits. They also invented a written script and made records of their discoveries.

A highly developed civilisation had grown out of a race that was once ignorant and this civilisation still remains, after more than one millennium.

Another example is the sudden rise of the Mongols. In one generation, a nomadic tribe divided into several warring factions, a race ignorant of land cultivation and thus forced to constantly move to new grazing areas for their animals, became a race that controlled the world.

The primitive and uncivilised were united under Genghis Khan and taught new cultural values such as discipline. They were then socially organised regardless of tribe and sent to wealthy neighbouring countries after vigorous training. These people, now part of the Mongolian army, moved quickly, attacking and conquering empires from China in the east to Hungary in the west.

They took over the civilisations they had conquered and built a number of states in East and West Asia, Central Asia and India.

We know all empires and civilisations eventually collapsed. But for a race with a great civilisation, its contributions and impact remain even after the empire does not exist anymore.

We Malays have been colonised by the West for 450 years, beginning with the fall of Malacca into the hands of the Portuguese. The small peninsular Malay States became smaller because they allowed rulers of small areas to be self-governing. With the death of each ruler, battles ensued for the throne. Weaker descendants appealed for assistance from foreign powers and in return placed themselves under the rule of these powers.

Eventually, all the Malay States fell under foreign rule. But the Malays did nothing to free themselves and progress. Rulers were satisfied to receive political pension and surrendered their administration and economy to the colonial masters and immigrants.

As the bulk of tax collected was pilfered by the officers, only a small portion went to the Rulers. The tax collection was entrusted to the Chinese kapitans who assured higher returns. Likewise, the opium trade was monopolised by immigrants due to lack of trust towards their own officers.