

02/07/2001

Don't destroy, says Dr Mahathir

Patvinder Singh

KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - Undergraduates in the country were today reminded not to destroy what they will eventually inherit from the country's older generation.

"The younger generation will take over. This is a natural process. We have to take care and ensure that what we will take over is in good condition so that we can improve on it," Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said at a symposium which was attended by 2,000 students representatives from all over the country.

Referring to incidents in a neighbouring country, he said street demonstrations and riots by students would not be beneficial or lead them to jobs or a better life.

Dr Mahathir said undergraduates had many responsibilities - to themselves, their family, society, race, religion and country.

"For this, we must have knowledge. If we feel as if we have lost directions and that universities are no longer for gaining knowledge, then we must return to the right path.

"There is no need to study in universities or have higher education to demonstrate in the streets," he said.

Dr Mahathir said this when closing the "Symposium on Reaffirming the Idealism of Undergraduates in the New Millennium" at Universiti Malaya. He said no society was 100 per cent perfect and that in a democratic country like Malaysia people could determine their fate through the voting process every five years.

"The vote reflects the people's power. If used wisely, it can be beneficial to the society," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the Government was aware of the generation gap that existed between the young and the old in many fields including administration and politics.

"In religion too, the young are not satisfied and feel religious sentiments are not strong while the old feel they have done all that they could well do. "Just because there are these differences it does not mean the older generation must be enemies of the younger generation or vice-versa.

"We must not be angry with the older generation for not doing something that we felt was necessary and due to anger we spoil everything," he said.

The Prime Minister instead called on students to be prepared to take over from the older generation.

At the beginning of his speech, he expressed sadness that the university's Dewan Tunku Canselor was destroyed by fire as it was a landmark.

Dr Mahathir said it was as if some students came not to acquire knowledge but to study "the field of how to burn a building."

To a question from a student on why undergraduates were sometimes labelled as anti-establishment due to differing views, Dr Mahathir said individual opinions were never a problem and only attracted negative reactions when they were wrongly and abusively expressed.

"For example, resorting to such acts, like arson merely to get a point across is not acceptable," he said drawing laughter and cheers from the crowd.

He said though there were even dissatisfactions among Umno members, they did not go around demonstrating and being abusive over the whole thing.

Dr Mahathir was also asked on Government efforts to assist the Chinese community, especially in the field of education.

He said at present, there was nothing the Government could do about the 55:45 quota system in public universities.

However, he said there were ample opportunities now for the non-Malays to pursue their education at the various private institutions of higher learning in the country.

"In the past, students would have to go overseas for their further education, but now the Government has been very flexible in allowing more private institutions to be set up," said.