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Umno-Malay Dilemma (News Focus)

DR MAHATHIR'S SPEECH VIEWED BY SOME AS "MALAY DILEMMA II"

By: Jamaluddin Muhammad and Muin Majid

KUALA LUMPUR, June 21 (Bernama) -- Some delegates at this year's Umno general assembly failed to see the reasons why Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had raised the same old stories about the weakness of the Malays in various fields in his keynote address.

"We have heard them many times. Didn't he have anything new to tell us?" asked one delegate when met after the opening of the three-day meeting.

At a glimpse, it seems to be so.

But if one looks at it closer, something is certainly not right with the Malays, if Dr Mahathir has to say it over and over again, even three decades after penning his book, "The Malay Dilemma".

In the over 180-page book published in 1970, Dr Mahathir, among others, touched on the 13th May racial riots in Kuala Lumpur and underlined factors that drove the Malays to be economically backward at that time.

According to him, among the factors was the attitude of the Malays themselves -- contented with what they have with no desire to improve their life for the better.

This was because the Malays then believed that "Beras Secupak Takkan Jadi Segantang", in other words if they were born poor, they would remain poor and would never be rich.

In his speech which could be viewed as "The Malay Dilemma II", Dr Mahathir said that by rough estimate, one per cent of the country's economic wealth was in the hands of the Malays during the colonial days.

Unfortunately, after trying for 30 years, Dr Mahathir said the Malays still could not acquire 30 per cent of the country's economy as outlined in the New Economy Policy (NEP).

"After 43 years of struggling, after allocating billions of ringgit, after setting up several banks and funds, the achievement of the Malays today in commerce and industry is still below expectation.

"We still have not moved our businesses from the sidewalk to a concrete shop," he said.

The same scenario can also be seen in the field of education.

The number of Malay students, who succeeded in getting places in universities, was also not encouraging in spite of the vast opportunities given to them by the government.

This, said Dr Mahathir, was due to their own laziness, preferring to loiter and having a good time, as well as not giving emphasis to acquire knowledge like students from other communities.

"It is very sad to see Malay children with such poor qualifications which in the absence of the special quota will see many of them failing to enter universities," he said.

The conclusion one can make based on the book written 30 years ago and today's speech of Dr Mahathir is that the Malays have not change and they have not learnt.

What worries Dr Mahathir is if the Malays lose their political power while they are still weak and lagging behind in various fields.

This is not impossible, given the present scenario where the Malays are divided and fighting each other.

The main factor which makes it difficult for them to change is their view that the country under the Umno-led government will always be there to protect the interest of the Malays.

The situation might not be so, as portrayed by Dr Mahathir, with the opposition now planning strategies to get the support of the non-Malays to win the general election.

Thus, what Dr Mahathir is trying to do is to warn the Malays of the consequences before it is too late.

--BERNAMA

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