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PM joins top students for lunch

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PUTRAJAYA, Wed. - "It's an honour and privilege to have lunch with you."

These words were uttered by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad when he joined top scorers from last year's Form Five exams for lunch here.

It was the first time that such an event was held. A total of 190 top graders in the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia were feted to the lunch, hosted by Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

The students had a pleasant surprise when Abdullah brought Dr Mahathir to join them.

Several Ministers who attended the weekly Cabinet meeting also joined them.

The students came from all over the country. The country's highest achiever, Ong Jin Hock from SMK Ibrahim, Sungai Petani, was among the 190 who had earlier toured Putrajaya. He and six other students were then given the honour to join the Prime Minister at the main table.

When Dr Mahathir walked into the hall, he was given a loud applause by the students, many of whom took photographs of the Prime Minister.

After lunch, Dr Mahathir spoke to the students briefly. He gave them one important message - "give back to society what society has given you".

Dr Mahathir told the students that they were indebted to society which created an environment conducive enough for them to pursue their ambitions and goals in life.

He also told them to be grateful for the good fortune they have enjoyed and to reciprocate later in life by making it possible for the younger generation to have access to the same.

"You must remember to return to society what you have enjoyed during your student days because it was society which made it possible for you to pursue your goals.

"If you do not do so, then you will not be giving the younger generation the benefits you enjoyed while you were one.

"This feeling of gratitude should pervade your thinking," he said.

Citing examples, Dr Mahathir said some students who received study loans from the Government simply refused to pay the money back, thus depriving many others from pursuing tertiary education.

He regretted this attitude saying that it was their responsibility to pay the loans back so others may enjoy the privilege later.

"Never think of yourself alone. It was society which gave us the opportunity and we are now duty-bound to give it back to society.

"If you have brains like Einstein's but are self-centred, you would eventually lose out."

Dr Mahathir told the students that they should possess a good personality, appreciate people and their surroundings.

He said relationships with lecturers, vice-chancellors and the Government should be preserved because this was the way "we Malaysians lived".

The younger generation, he said, should remember that their elders had worked hard to preserve racial harmony and make Malaysia a peaceful country so that their children could have a good education and a stable life.

"You must go to some countries, especially the poorer ones and then see how fortunate we are.

"There were 10 of us sitting at the table just now and we could not even finish our food. In some countries, people do not even have food to eat.

"I hope they (the organisers) will not throw the food away," he said in jest. Referring to the students, Dr Mahathir said it was good that many students were doing well in their studies as the country would need more knowledge workers in future.

However, he told them to specialise in fields which were in demand.

Previously, he said, students with Bachelor of Arts or Master of Arts were taken into important positions in the civil service.

Times have, however, changed and such positions now required applicants to be more specialised.

"Now you need to have good computer skills and the technical know-how if you want to excel in any field."

Dr Mahathir said many foreign organisations would make offers to lure the best Malaysian brains to their countries by offering much higher remuneration.

He also had the students in stitches when he told those who wished to go abroad to work to do so but to come back "with all the money you can make".

However, Dr Mahathir, told them to bear in mind at all times that Malaysia was their home and it was here that they were raised and received their education.

He said they were among those who would have to ensure the success of Vision 2020.

"I won't be around then ... but I will be hovering up there somewhere to see what you are doing.

"If I feel you are doing the wrong things, I may consider bringing the typhoon (to make you realise)," he said, which again drew much laughter from the students.