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`Real Merdeka only through self reliance and social justice'

KUALA KANGSAR, Fri. - Former political secretary to the late Tun Abdul Razak and prominent columnist Tan Sri Abdullah Ahmad said tonight the Malays must strive for self-reliance and social justice as there cannot be "real Merdeka" unless they attain economic independence.

Abdullah, who is also the New Straits Times Press (M) Bhd executive director, stressed the importance of knowledge, which he described as capable of giving its bearer power.

"Knowledge is power. By nature all boys and girls are alike, but by education widely different," he told a gathering of students at the Malay College Kuala Kangsar. The event was held in conjunction with the National Day celebrations.

The hall was packed with about 600 students.

Earlier in the afternoon, Abdullah spent about two hours going down the memory lane, starting from the prep school where he started schooling in MCKK in 1948 and moving to the big school where he spent most of his years until he left in 1954.

Abdullah, an old boy of the college, said the Malaysian dream stressed on equal opportunity, which would not be realised if the Malays continued to be dependent on the Government for everything.

He said the college was a good example of the advantages of meritocracy.

"When I arrived at MCKK in 1948, it was essentially a school for the Rajas and aristocrats. It was worse before the Second World War.

"The war changed it all. Dato' Onn (Umno founder Dato' Onn Jaafar) was partly responsible for making MCKK a residential school for all Malays based on meritocracy, instead of birth as the passport to enter it.

"For sure, if it had not been for meritocracy I would not have got here. Nor would you."

He said the rise of a son of a taxi driver to be an architect, another a Cabinet Minister and yet another, the son of a male nurse, who nearly became the Prime Minister - from rags to riches as it were - was an enactment of the Malaysian dream.

"In the personal sense, I can only say this to you tonight that I believe in the Malaysian dream as I have seen it come true in my life."

He said the Government wanted a combination of freedom and opportunity with growing overtones of self-reliance, social justice and less manjarism or subsidy syndrome, and less dependence on the Government for everything.

"As we continue to enjoy the fruits of Merdeka; and you inhabit this great college, it is imperative that we continue to learn wisely the lessons in history.

"History can be a force welding the people together. The past will mirror the future."

He said although the Malays formed the largest group in the country, they were also the poorest and least educated, "though we appear to be dominant in politics, in civil service, the armed forces and the police." Nothing else really besides these, he added.

"The Chinese, though only 26 per cent of the population, control the economy together with the foreigners. They excel in education and along with the Indians dominate the professions, information technology and K-economy."

He said the Malaysian Chinese were the most productive element of the economy, and urged the Malays to learn and imitate the Chinese.

"Globalisation is gathering speed. The question is how speedily are we preparing ourselves and responding to it."

He said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has asked the Malays to stop the rot in education and general discipline.

"I cannot agree more. Fish rots from the head, and like fish society is an organic system and also rots from the head."

He said the British accorded independence to the country because the Malays could work with the Chinese and Indians.

"Together we achieved freedom, together we defeated the communist revolt and in concert we built and are building this nation into what it is now and I pray for what it shall be."

Abdullah said Pas wanted to turn Malaysia into an Islamic theocratic state but whether it succeeded was another matter. He doubted that it would because Malaysia was not a homogenous society.

"It can't happen here because of the delicate racial balance which exists. The non-Malays will not support it nor Malay liberals and the intelligentsia."

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