

26/08/2001

Single session schools (HL)

Manan Osman; Mimi Syed Yusof; M.Hamzah Jamaludin

IPOH, Sat. - Plans are under way to turn all schools in the country into a single session for the benefit of students, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said very soon students would no longer have to share classrooms besides enjoying better facilities, including access to computers.

So far, 600 schools have enjoyed the benefits of a single session and 600 more are in the process of conversion.

"At present we have a total of 9,000 schools including primary schools and the effort will take some time to materialise," he said at the Sultan Azlan Shah Airport before leaving for Kuala Lumpur after a half-day visit to Perak.

Dr Mahathir said the process could be slowed down by insufficient funds, although a major portion of the nation's budget went to education.

"In fact, we allocated a large amount of the budget for education and rural development when other countries are spending a lot of money on defence," he added.

On whether MIC would also be allowed to set up its own university like the MCA, Dr Mahathir said it was not a question of whether it belonged to the MCA or MIC.

He said the Government would consider applications to set up universities if there was a demand and that the applicants met the necessary criteria besides having sufficient funds.

On the proposed Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman, he said it was not a Chinese university but one which would follow the national curriculum.

He also said that there were mixed reaction from parents on the move to introduce meritocracy in the selection of students into public universities.

"Some were very critical but there were others who supported it. This is normal because we have been taking it easy all this while."

Earlier, when addressing some 5,000 school prefects nationwide during a Perhimpunan Patriotik (Patriotic Assembly) at Stadium Indera Mulia here, Dr Mahathir advised students not to take the country's independence for granted.

He said the younger generation must remember that there was no guarantee that they could enjoy the country's freedom forever as there were already attempts to colonise the country once again.

He said recent efforts to impoverish the nation by attacking the ringgit which almost forced the Government to beg for help from foreign forces was one example.

"If we had resorted to that, it will be just like before. Don't think it cannot happen.

"That is why the younger generation must start from now to equip themselves with knowledge so that they can take over the country's leadership and continue with its development agenda."

Dr Mahathir said despite achieving 44 years of independence, Malaysia was still young in many ways.

"Compare that with the number of years we have been colonised - almost 450 years. We have to remember there is still so much more to be achieved in all aspects.

"We still need scientists, doctors, architects, accountants and the like to further develop the country."

Recalling the colonisation period, Dr Mahathir said Malaysians were made slaves under the British, tortured when the Japanese took over and then turned into second-class citizens when the British returned to power after World War II.

He said it was even more demeaning for Malaya during the Japanese occupation when the Japanese surrendered Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan and Terengganu to the Siamese Government.

Not many people, Dr Mahathir said, could remember how shameful it was to be colonised and admitted that it might be difficult for those who had not undergone the experience to know what it was like at that time.

"Today, we have moved forward by leaps and bounds and many visitors have described Malaysia as a developed nation.

"Actually, we are still behind ... there are still many areas which need to be developed."