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Teachers play a key role, says Dr M

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Teachers play a key role in nation-building as they are responsible to nurture values and good practices among the younger generation, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said the future of the country depended on the ability of teachers to mould the characters of their charges.

"They are responsible to teach but a more important task is to impart and nurture values so that the children will grow up and become responsible citizens," he told a convention of master teachers at the Legend Hotel.

He said all races were born with the same capability as the factor that determines between success and backwardness was the culture and values they subscribed to.

For example, he said, the Arab Jahiliah were once uncivilised but after embracing Islam, tremendous progress was made as they practised values advocated by the religion.

Dr Mahathir said one had to ask why certain races were successful while some lagged and remained backward.

"Is it because some are born much smarter than others? But we know of races which were once backward but have managed to make considerable progress," he said.

He said Malays could be used as an example as many had become successful in various fields compared with the situation many years ago.

"This shows the Malays possessed the ability to progress," he said.

However, he said teachers should recognise that some students were poor in some subjects but excel in others.

Therefore, they should be given the encouragement and guidance to succeed in their areas of interest.

Dr Mahathir said races which were hard working and pursued knowledge aggressively would normally be ahead of those who were lazy and indifferent to equipping themselves with education and skills.

"If we accept that it is the values that make the difference, then the road to success is quite easy.

"We just need to identify these values and practise them. But we have to admit that we do not practise many of them in our life."

For example, Dr Mahathir said Islam advocates its followers to unite and seek knowledge but the Malays in the country were not doing that.

"Islam does not teach us to 'drag' people down but this is what some of us do."

The Prime Minister said it was clear there had been some erosion in values among society, in which teachers could help arrest the decline.

"Before, we never heard of children murdering their parents, daughters raped by her own fathers and so on. But these are happening now."

Dr Mahathir said one might not be that clever but if he was prepared to work hard, achieving success would be within sight.

"If we do something more than once, surely we will become efficient. If this principle is adhered to, I am sure we will be able to master even the most complex knowledge."

The Prime Minister expressed confidence that if Malaysians were prepared to work hard, they would not only compete but surpass the capabilities of others.